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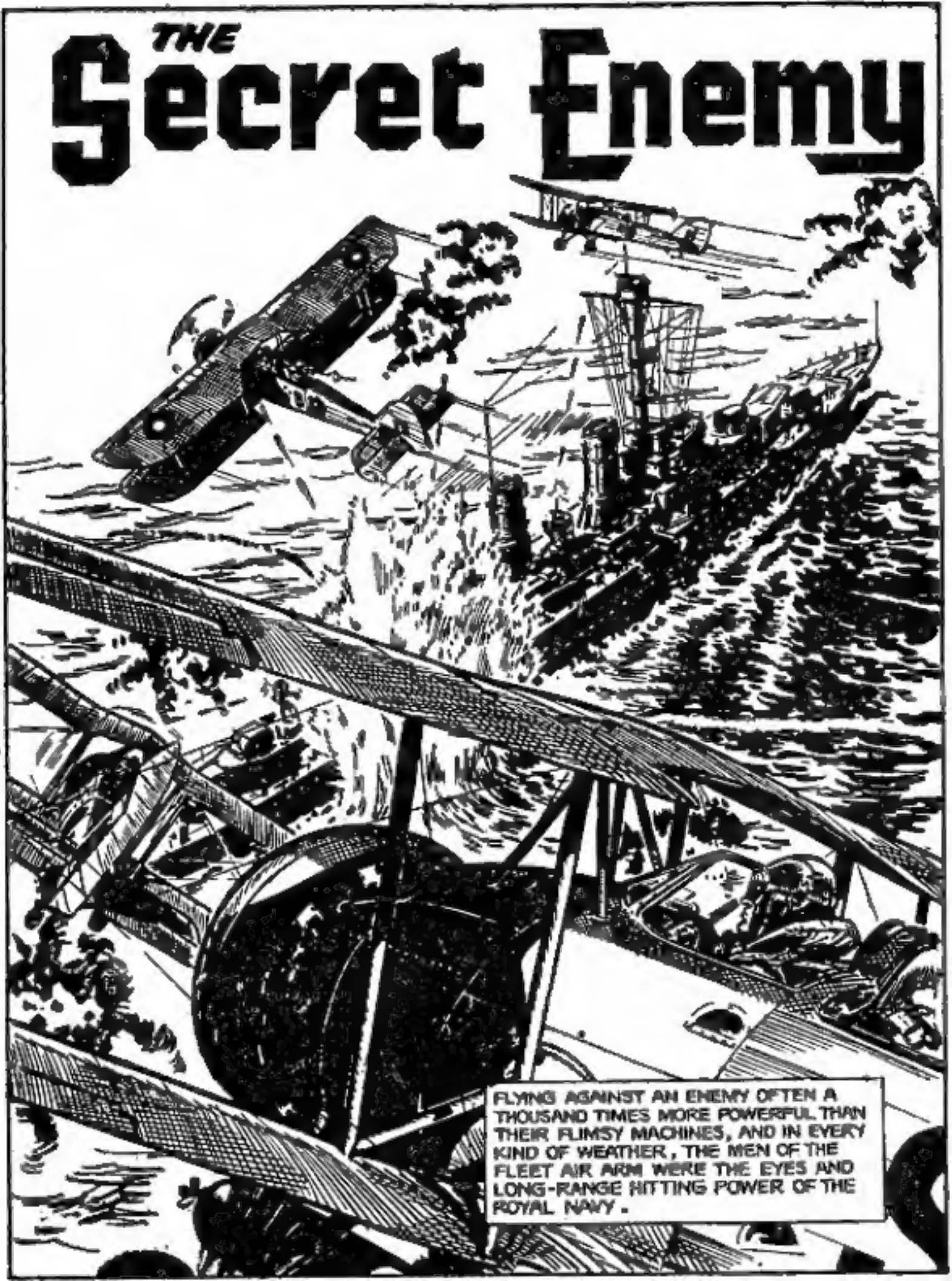
THE Secret Enemy



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Chapter 1. *Murder Clue*

THE SWORDFISH AIRCRAFT SWUNG JERKILY TO PORT AS SHE DIPPED TOWARDS THE AIRCRAFT CARRIER. TO THE MEN ON BOARD *H.M.S. BERWICK* IT ALMOST SEEMED AS IF SHE WAS TRYING TO AVOID THE REFUSE OF THE FLIGHT DECK . . .

STONE ME, SID! HE'S DOOSIN' ALL OVER THE PLACE!

NO WONDER, MATE. LOOK AT THE STATE HE'S IN!

LIEUTENANT-COMMANDER JAMES BOOTH, COMMANDER FLYING OF *BERWICK'S* AIRCRAFT, WRESTLED THE TORPEDO BOMBER BACK ON COURSE BY BRUTE FORCE.

HANG ON, ROGERS! WE'RE NEARLY DOWN...

BUT REASSURING THOUGH HIS WORDS WERE, BOOTH KNEW THOSE FEW YARDS HE HAD TO COVER TO THE FLIGHT DECK WOULD BE THE MOST PERILOUS HE HAD EVER FLOWN.
HELLO, CONTROL. HAVING CONSIDERABLE DIFFICULTY— SUGGEST A CRASH PARTY...
CRASH PARTY STANDING BY, SIR! GOOD LUCK!

ONLY HIS SUPERB FLYING SKILL LINED THE AIRCRAFT UP WITH THE DECK. THEY WERE VERY CLOSE NOW. HE KICKED THE RUDDER BAR OVER— *BUT THERE WAS NO RESPONSE...*
BY HEAVENS! SHE WON'T ANSWER...

The Secret Enemy

THE TAIL UNIT OF THE PLANE HAD BEEN HURLED CLEAR BY THE IMPACT OF THE CRASH. THERE WAS A RATING PINNED BENEATH IT...
YOU TWO! AT THE DOUBLE! WE'VE GOT TO GET THAT BLOKE OUT...

THE MAN WAS HAULED CLEAR — BUT THEY WERE TOO LATE. FIFTEEN MINUTES LATER, THE SHATTERED REMNANTS OF THE SWORDFISH WERE LYING ON THE HANGAR FLOOR. CHIEF PETTY OFFICER BARKER'S FACE WAS GRIM AS HE LOOKED UP FROM IT...
WHAT'S WRONG, CHIEF?
I RECKON SOMEONE WANTED MISTER BOOTH TO CRASH, SIR. LOOK AT THIS...

LIEUTENANT PETER THOMAS KNELT BESIDE THE CHIEF — AND WHAT HE SAW SENT A CHILL RIGHT THROUGH HIM . . .
BY THE STARS! YOU'RE RIGHT, CHIEF — THOSE ARE SAW MARKS ON THAT RUDDER BAR. I'D BETTER SEE THE CAPTAIN RIGHT AWAY. KEEP THIS TO YOURSELF, FOR PETE'S SAKE!
AYE AYE, SIR. I'LL DO THAT.

IT WAS A STUNNED CAPTAIN SPENCER R.N., WHO LISTENED TO PETER THOMAS FIVE MINUTES LATER . . .
. . . AND I'M AFRAID THERE'S NO QUESTION ABOUT IT, SIR. IT WAS COLD DELIBERATE MURDER!
I'VE COME UP AGAINST MANY THINGS IN MY SERVICE — BUT MURDER! I'LL HAVE TO REPORT THIS TO THE C-IN-C, THOMAS. MEANWHILE, I DON'T WANT THIS TO GET OUT...

WHAT BEATS ME, SIR, IS WHY ANYONE WOULD WANT TO MURDER JIM BOOTH. EVERYBODY LIKED HIM...
I AGREE—I AGREE. WELL, THERE'S NOTHING MUCH WE CAN DO ABOUT IT AT THE MOMENT. I EXPECT WE'LL BE PESTERED WITH DETECTIVE CHAPPIES AS SOON AS WE GET BACK INTO PORT— WHENEVER THAT WILL BE!

THE CAPTAIN'S NEXT WORDS TOOK THE YOUNG OFFICER COMPLETELY BY SURPRISE.
THOMAS, I NEED A NEW COMMANDER FLYING. I'M RECOMMENDING YOU FOR THE JOB— AND NO ARGUMENTS! YOU HAD BETTER TAKE ON YOUR DUTIES AS FROM NOW...

IN SENIORITY, PETER WAS ON A LEVEL WITH SEVERAL OF THE OTHER PILOTS. COMMAND WAS THE LAST THING HE HAD EXPECTED.
VERY GOOD, SIR. THANK YOU...
NOW WATCH YOUR STEP. WE'VE A KILLER IN OUR MIDST. HE DOESN'T KNOW WE'RE ON TO HIM—*YET*. KEEP YOUR EYES AND EARS OPEN, THOUGH.

PETER THOMAS'S APPOINTMENT DID NOT PLEASE ALL OF THE AIRCREW MESS . . .
. . . WELL, I DON'T LIKE IT! I THINK THEY SHOULD HAVE DRAFTED A NEW COMMANDER ON BOARD.
- GET AWAY, GEORGE! YOU'VE ALWAYS HAD IT IN FOR COMMANDER FLYING WHATEVER SHIP YOU'VE BEEN ON. ANYWAY, WE'RE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE MED., SOMEONE HAD TO TAKE OVER . . .

GEORGE PATTERSON IGNORED THE REMARK HE WAS A SUB-LIEUTENANT PILOT—HAD BEEN FOR FOUR YEARS . . .
SAY WHAT YOU LIKE. I RECKON DAVE'LL BE CUT UP ABOUT IT, HE THOUGHT HE WAS IN LINE.
WHAT! DAVE HARVEY! YOU'RE OFF YOUR ROCKER, OLD SON. DAVE HARVEY DOESN'T GET MAD AT ANYTHING.

PATTERSON WAS A SCANDAL-MONGER. ALL ON BOARD THE *BERWICK* KNEW THAT, BUT THIS TIME THERE WAS AN UNUSUAL CONVICTION IN HIS VOICE . . .
THERE'LL BE TROUBLE OVER THIS AND IT WON'T BE LONG COMING, EITHER . . .

THE TOPIC OF CONVERSATION UP FORWARD DAVE HARVEY, WAS AT THAT MOMENT RELAXING IN HIS CABIN. HE TURNED HIS HEAD CASUALLY AT THE LIGHT KNOCK ON HIS DOOR . . .
COME IN!

HARVEY SWUNG HIMSELF OFF THE BUNK AS PETER THOMAS ENTERED. THE SOFT DRAWL OF HIS CANADIAN ACCENT AND THE TOUGHNESS OF HIS CHARACTER.
HI THERE, PETE! HEARD ANY MORE ABOUT JIM BOOTH'S PRANG? HE SURE MADE A MASH OF THINGS . . .

THE TWO MEN HAD BEEN FLYING TOGETHER SINCE THE OUTBREAK OF THE WAR. IN THAT TIME, PETER HAD LEARNT A LOT ABOUT DAVE HARVEY, PARTICULARLY THAT HE WAS A MAN OF LITTLE SENTIMENT.
NO I HAVEN'T HEARD ANYTHING MORE — BUT I WISH YOU WEREN'T SO DARNED CASUAL ABOUT IT, DAVE.
KNOCK IT OFF, PETE! THERE'S A QUEUE OUTSIDE THE CEMETERY, OLD SON — EITHER OF US COULD BE NEXT IN LINE.

WHEN HARVEY TALKED LIKE THAT, PETER FELT A DISTINCT STRAIN ON THEIR FRIENDSHIP FOR HE, HIMSELF, HAD A DEEP RESPECT FOR ALL THE PILOTS OF THE SQUADRON AND THE WAY THEY FOUGHT — AND DIED.

ANYWAY, DAVE, I DIDN'T COME HERE FOR THAT. THE CAPTAIN'S JUST MADE ME UP TO COMMANDER FLYING . . .

WELL, I'LL BE DARNED...

IF THERE WAS ANY JEALOUSY OR REGRET IN DAVE HARVEY'S VOICE, IT WAS NOT APPARENT.

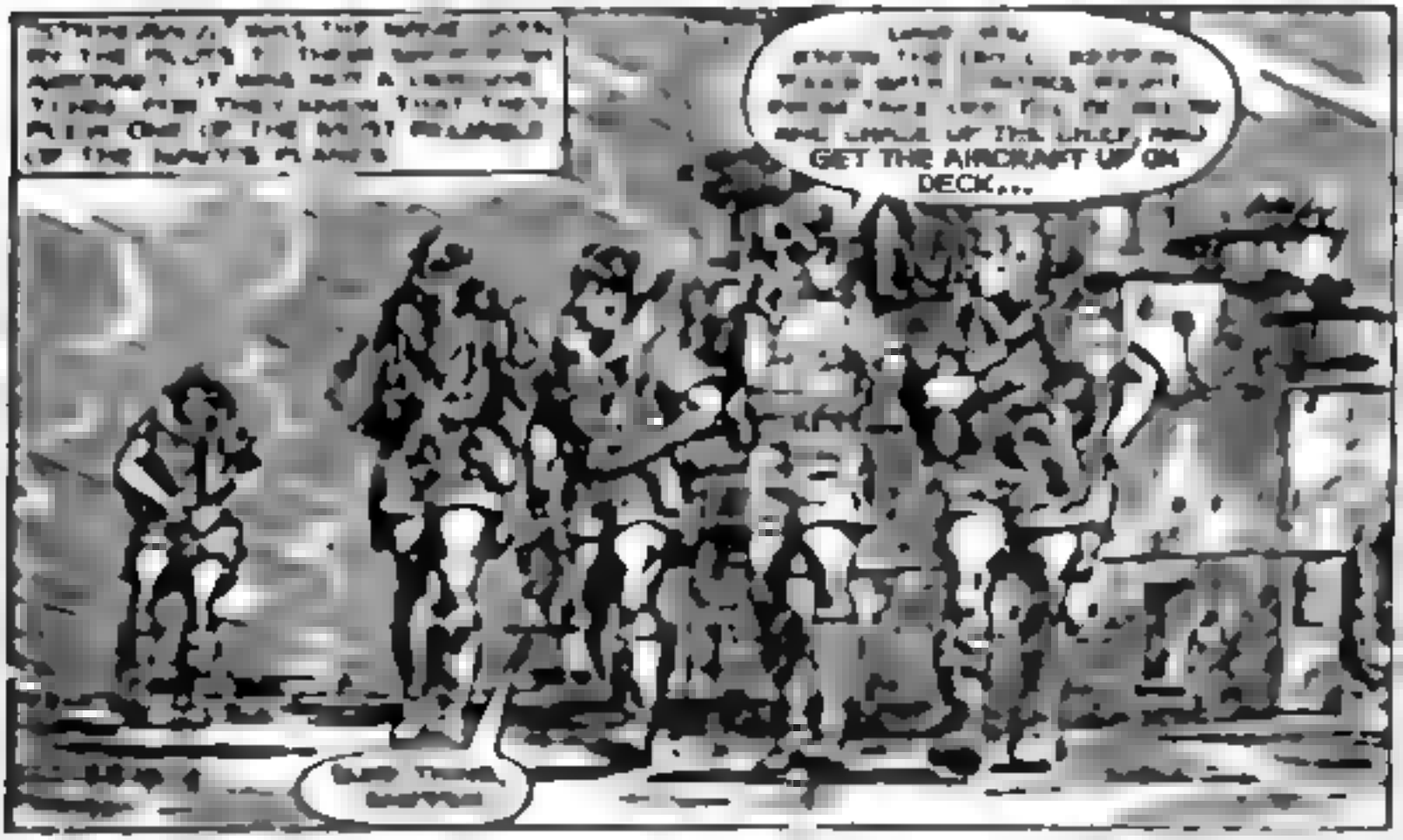
CONGRATULATIONS, PETE! RATHER YOU THAN ME! I'M NOT THE TYPE TO GIVE ORDERS — ONLY RECEIVE 'EM!

PETER WAS GRATEFUL TO THE OTHER THEN, FOR HE KNEW DAVE *HAD* WANTED COMMAND — AS DID MOST OF THE PILOTS ON BOARD.

THANKS, DAVE — AND TALKING OF ORDERS. THERE'LL BE A SUB PATROL TOMORROW. I'M PUTTING YOUR NAME DOWN.

YOU SURE DON'T WASTE ANY TIME — SKIPPER!

Chapter 2. Death Flies High



PETER MADE HIS WAY TO THE VAST BETWEEN DECKS WORKSHOP HANGARS WHERE THE TWO AIRCRAFT TO BE FLOWN THAT DAY STOOD APART FROM THE OTHERS.
WHAT A LIFE, EH, SAM? WE SWEAT OURSELVES TO A STANDSTILL FOR THOSE YOUNG PERISHERS AND NOT A WORD OF THANKS...
AYE. MAKES YER SICK, DON'T IT, CHIEF?

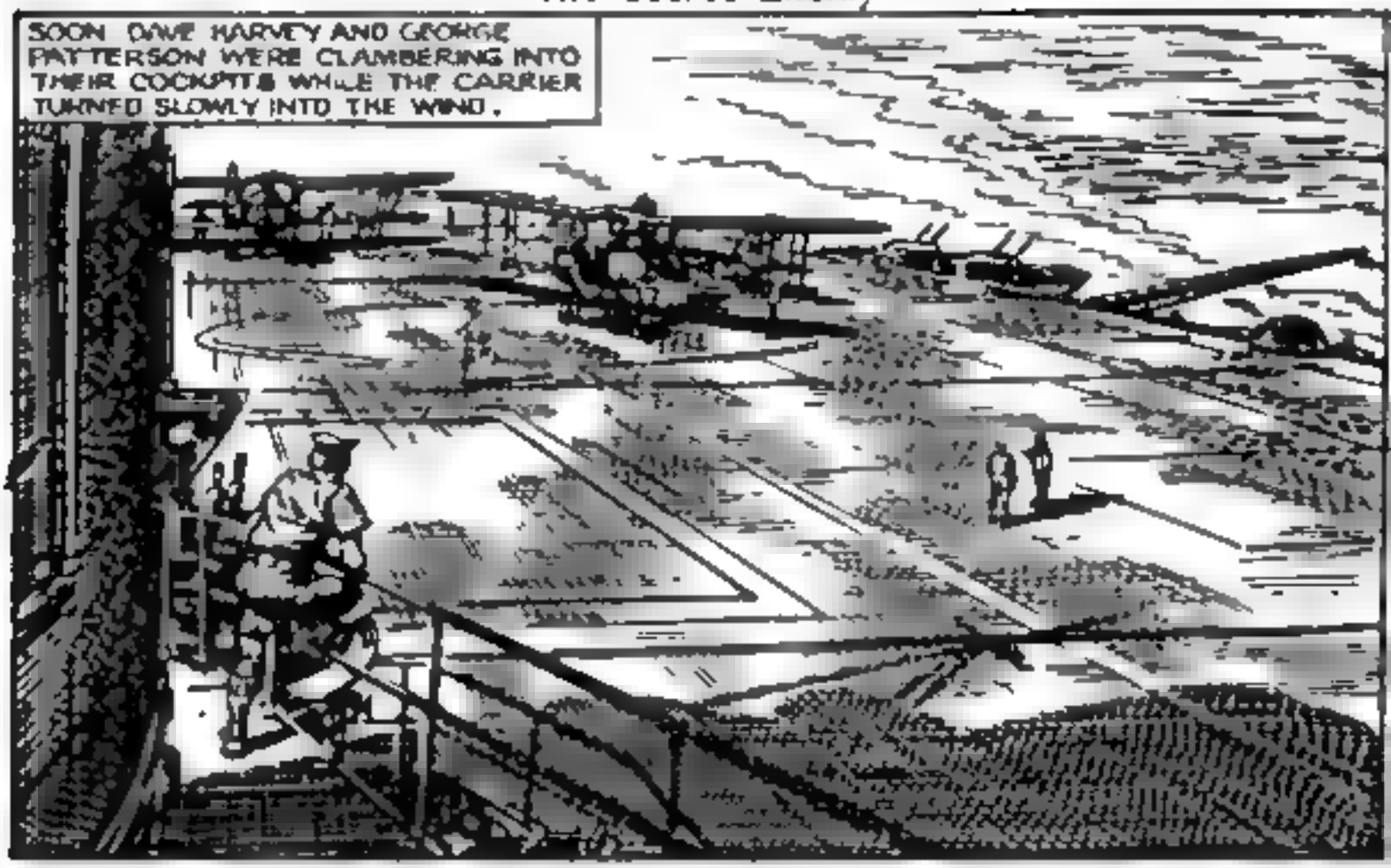
THE TWO MEN HAD NOT SEEN HIM APPROACHING, AND, REMEMBERING HIS CAPTAIN'S WORDS, HE DUCKED BEHIND A STACK OF EMPTY CANS.
I'VE WORKED ON PLENTY OF SHIPS IN MY TIME — DESTROYERS, MOSTLY. ON THEM, EVERYBODY MATTERED.
BIT DIFFERENT TO THIS BLOOMIN' GREAT HULK, I'LL BET!

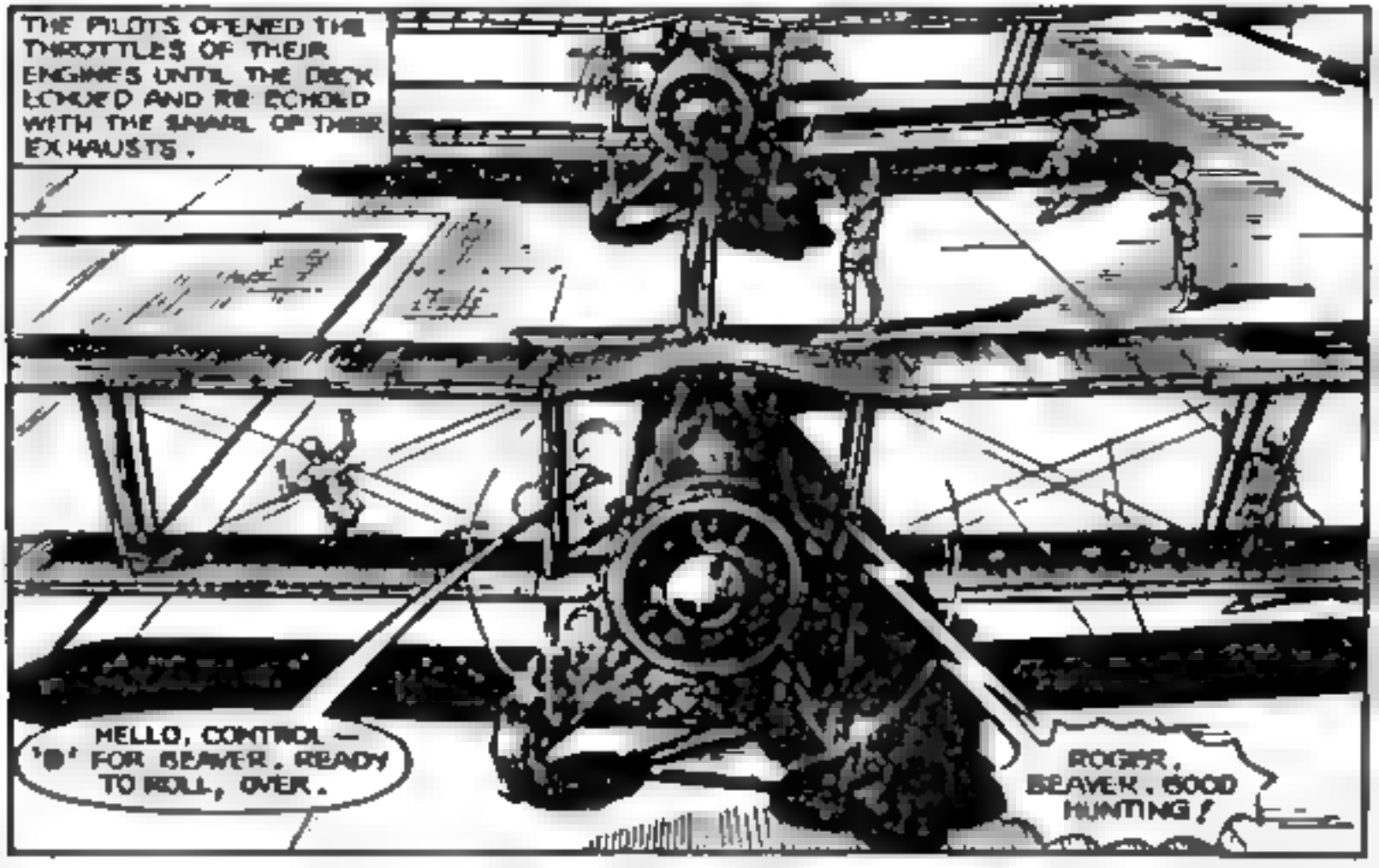
THERE WAS A BITTERNESS IN THE CHIEF PETTY OFFICER'S VOICE AS HE WENT ON . . .
ON BOARD A CARRIER, IT'S THEM FLYING TYPES WHO GET ALL THE GLORY AND THE FUSS MADE OF 'EM — WHILE WE DO THE WORK.
MAYBE YOU'RE RIGHT, CHIEF. STILL, IT'S CUSHY ENOUGH DOWN HERE IN THE HANGARS . . .

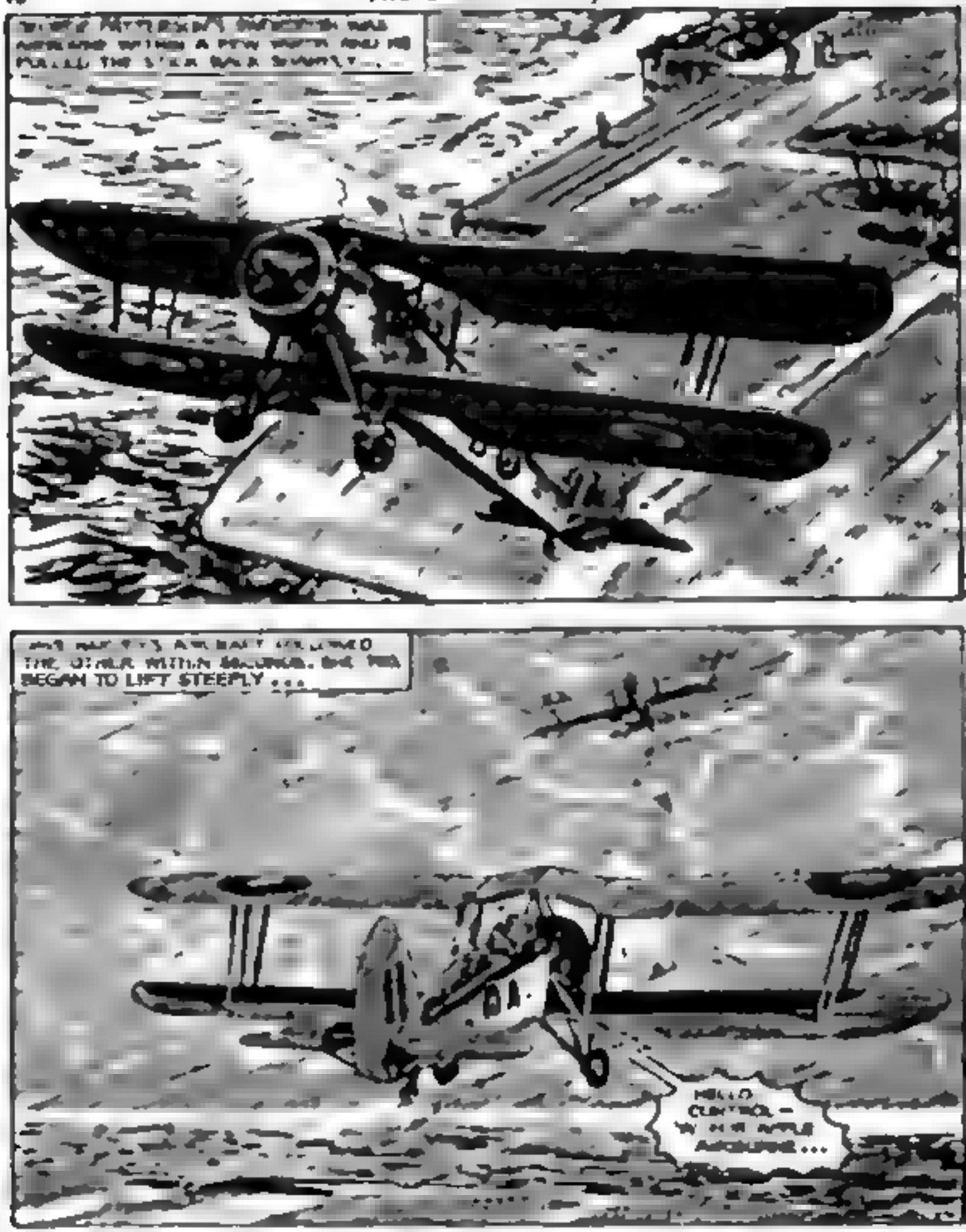
BARKER WENT ON DARKLY, IGNORING THE LEADING SEAMEN'S COMMENT . . .
MIND YOU, I COULD TELL THESE YOUNG PILOTS A THING OR TWO THAT'D WIPE THE COCKY [redacted] OFF THEIR FACES. IT WON'T BE ALL GLORY THIS TRIP, YOU MARK MY WORDS.

PETER CHOSE THAT MOMENT TO COME OUT OF HIDING . . .
WATCH IT, CHIEF! HERE COMES COMMANDER FLYING . . .

THE CHIEF THREW UP A VERY SMART SALUTE AND PETER FOUND IT HARD TO SUPPRESS A SMILE. THE MAN'S ATTITUDE WAS DIFFERENT NOW . . .
AFTERNOON, SIR.
AFTERNOON, CHIEF. EVERYTHING READY? GET THESE TWO AIRCRAFT UP ON DECK, PLEASE. THE AIRCREW ARE WAITING FOR THEM.
AYE AYE, SIR! EVERYTHING'S SHIP-SHAPE!


SOON DAVE HARVEY AND GEORGE PATTERSON WERE CLAMBERING INTO THEIR COCKPITS WHILE THE CARRIER TURNED SLOWLY INTO THE WIND.


THE PILOTS OPENED THE THROTTLES OF THEIR ENGINES UNTIL THE DECK ECHOED AND RE-ECHOED WITH THE SNARL OF THEIR EXHAUSTS.
HELLO, CONTROL — 'B' FOR BEAVER. READY TO ROLL, OVER.
ROGER, BEAVER. GOOD HUNTING!


BEGAN TO LIFT STEEPLY . . .

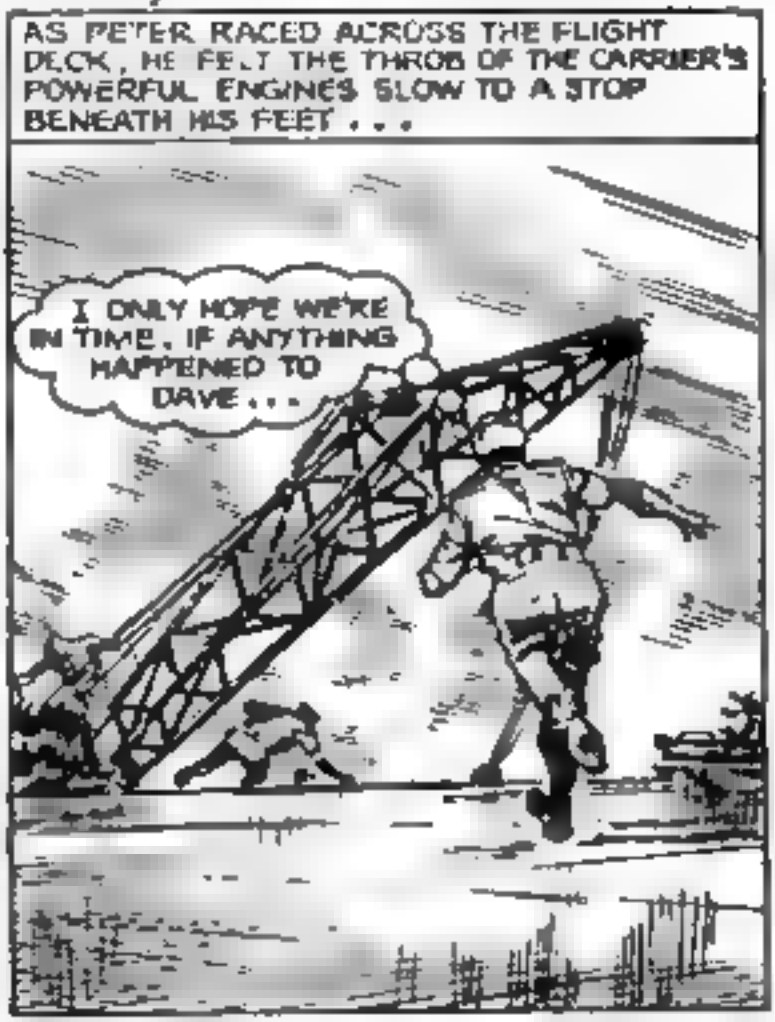
THEN IT HAPPENED — SO FAST THAT DAVE HARVEY WAS CAUGHT MENTALLY OFF BALANCE, GOOD FROM THROUGH HE WAS. THE ENGINE COUGHED ONCE — TWICE — AND DIED . . .
ARGH! SHE'S CUT OUT!

IT WAS THE MOST PERILOUS MOMENT OF A CARRIER PLANE'S FLIGHT — AND ALTHOUGH HARVEY INSTANTLY RAN THROUGH HIS EMERGENCY DRILL, THE ENGINE WOULD NOT RE-START . .
OBSERVER! WE'RE DITCHING! WHEN WE HIT THE WATER — GET OUT FAST!

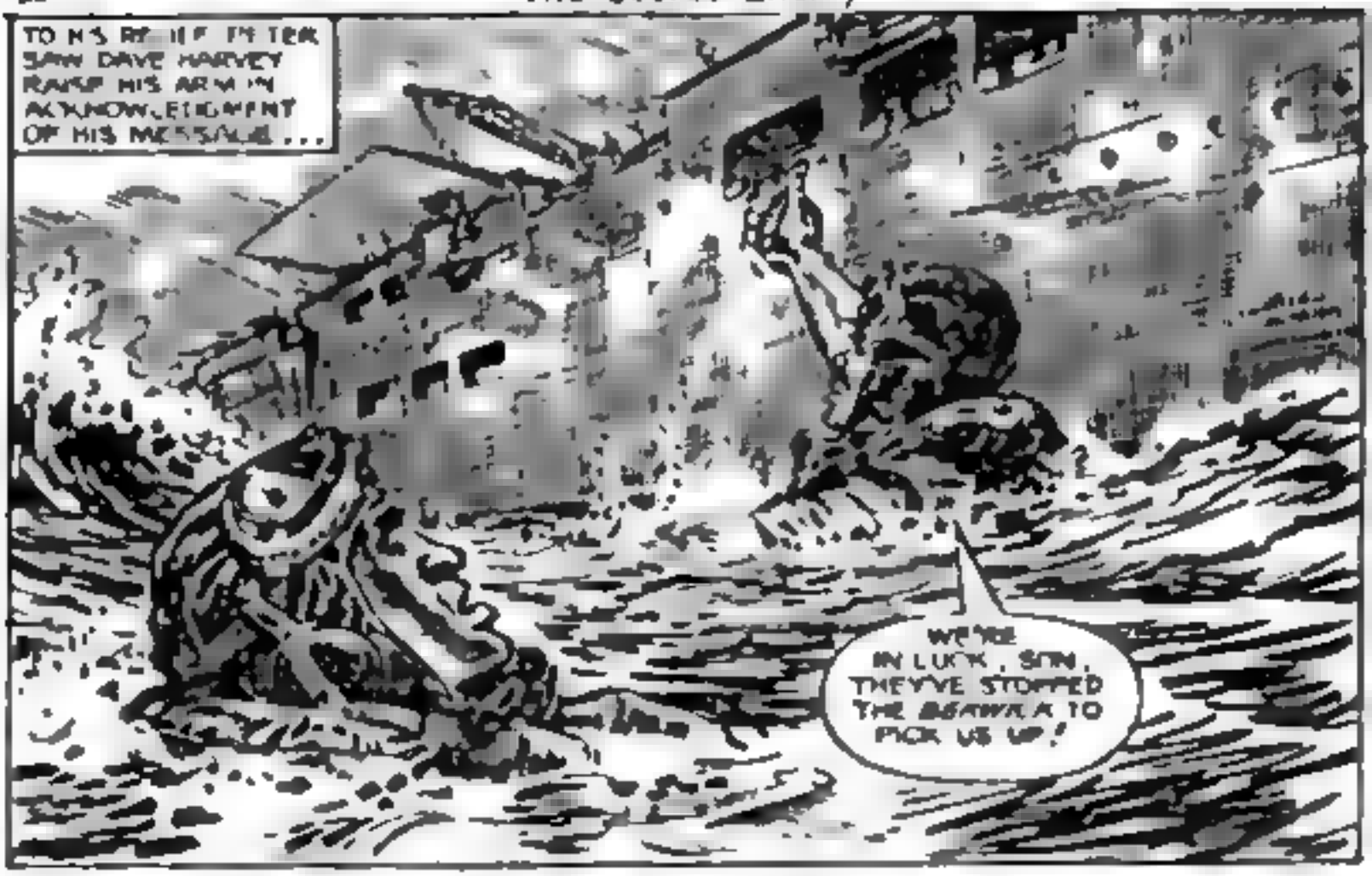
ONLY SUPERB FLYING SKILL ENABLED HIM TO HIT THE WATER STRAIGHT AND LEVEL BUT IT WAS AS IF THE SWORDFISH HAD CRASHED INTO A ROCKY HILLSIDE .

SHE BEGAN TO SETTLE FAST MUCH OF HER FUSELAGE RIPPED AWAY BY THE IMPACT. THE OBSERVER WAS ALREADY OVER THE SIDE AND SWIMMING AWAY AS DAVE HARVEY JUMPED . . .
HURRY UP, SIR — OR SHE'LL SUCK YOU UNDER WHEN SHE GOES!

THE MOMENT HE SAW THE TWO MEN JUMP INTO THE SEA, PETER THOMAS TURNED TO THE CAPTAIN.
CAN WE GET ALONGSIDE THEM, SIR?
I'LL DO WHAT I CAN, WINGS. GET YOUR CRASH CREWS AT THE READY!


AS PETER RACED ACROSS THE FLIGHT DECK, HE FELT THE THROB OF THE CARRIER'S POWERFUL ENGINES SLOW TO A STOP BENEATH HIS FEET . . .
I ONLY HOPE WE'RE IN TIME. IF ANYTHING HAPPENED TO DAVE . . .

HE GAVE A GASP OF RELIEF WHEN HE SAW THE TWO MEN IN THE SEA SPLASHING TOWARDS THE CARRIER'S CLIFF LIKE HULL.
WE WILL HOIST YOU ABOARD BY THE AIRCRAFT CRANE IF YOU CAN MAKE IT


TO HIS RELIEF PETER SAW DAVE HARVEY RAISE HIS ARM IN ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF HIS MESSAGE...
WE'RE IN LUCK, SON, THEY'VE STOPPED THE BEAWULA TO PICK US UP!

AT A WORD FROM PETER, THE CRANE BOOM SWUNG OUT AND THE CABLE BEGAN TO LOWER TOWARDS THE WAVE TOPS.

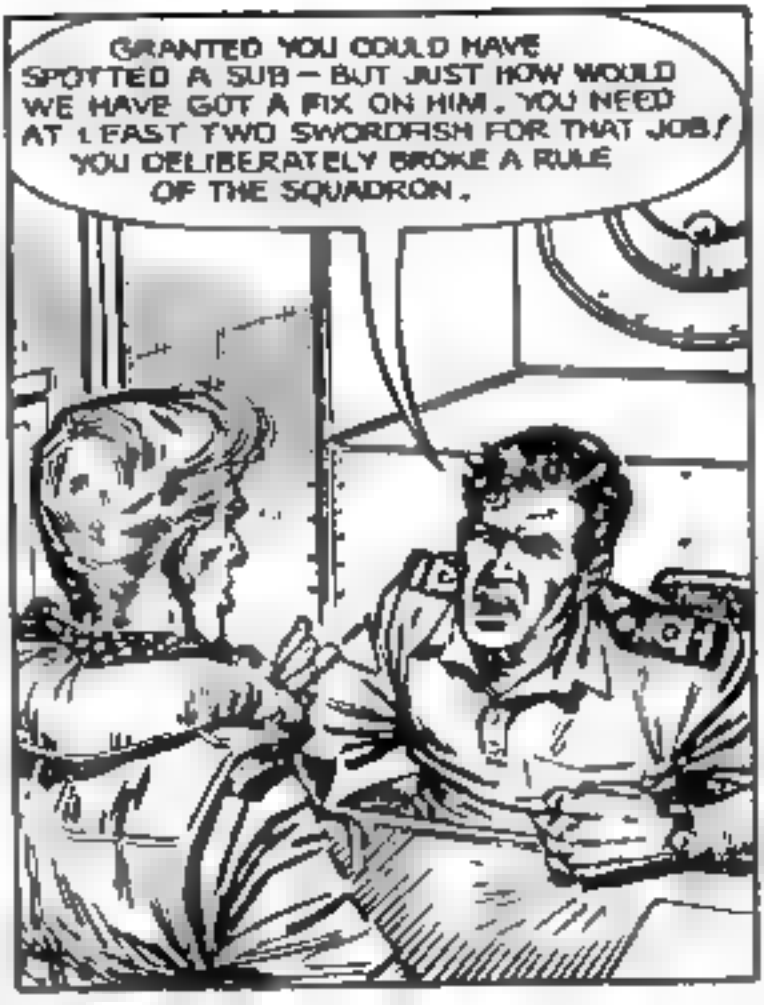
IT WAS THE WORK OF SECONDS TO HOIST THE TWO MEN ABOARD AND SOON THEY WERE STANDING ON THE FLIGHT DECK...
WHAT THE DICKENS HAPPENED, DAVE? IT'S NOT LIKE YOU TO MUFF A TAKE-OFF.
MUFF, NOTHING! THE DARNED ENGINE CUT RIGHT OUT ON ME JUST AS I LIFTED HER OFF...

A FURROW OF ANXIETY CREASED PETER'S HEAD AS DAVE AND HIS OBSERVER WALKED IRRITABLY AWAY.
ENGINE FAILURE! COULD IT HAVE BEEN THE WORK OF THE ONE WHO MEDDLED WITH THE COMMANDER'S PLANE?

HIS MIND WAS STILL IN A WHIRL WHEN HE REACHED THE BRIDGE BUT WAS SOON JERKED BACK TO REALITY...
WINGS! WHAT THE BLAZES IS YOUR 'B' FOR BEAVER PLAYING AT? THE DARNED FOOL'S GONE OFF ON HIS OWN. HE KNOWS THE REGULATIONS, DOESN'T HE?
PATTERSON! YOU MEAN HE'S STILL UP?
I MEAN JUST THAT! YOU'D BETTER RECALL HIM RIGHT AWAY, WINGS!

THE RULE WAS DEFINITE — SPOTTER AIRCRAFT MUST FLY IN PAIRS.
HELLO, 'B' BEAVER. RETURN TO BASE AT ONCE — REPEAT AT ONCE...
ROGER. CONTROL — OVER AND OUT.
THIS IS ALL I NEEDED FROM YOU, PATTERSON!

WITH N MINUTES OF LANDING, PATTERSON WAS CALLED TO HIS COMMANDER FLYING'S CABIN
ALL RIGHT, PATTERSON, WHAT'S YOUR EXCUSE THIS TIME? IT HAD BETTER BE GOOD!
I COULDN'T SEE ANY HARM IN STAYING UP, SKIPPER. I COULD HAVE SPOTTED ANY SUBS OUT THERE WITHOUT THE HELP OF DAVE HARVEY...


GRANTED YOU COULD HAVE SPOTTED A SUB — BUT JUST HOW WOULD WE HAVE GOT A FIX ON HIM. YOU NEED AT LEAST TWO SWORDFISH FOR THAT JOB! YOU DELIBERATELY BROKE A RULE OF THE SQUADRON.

THERE WAS NO EXCUSE. ANY OTHER MAN WOULD HAVE KEPT SILENT THEN AND TAKEN HIS PUNISHMENT. BUT THIS WAS GEORGE PATTERSON . . .
OKAY, SO I BROKE A RULE — BUT WHAT HARM DID I DO?
RULES ARE THERE TO BE OBEYED! I COULD HAVE YOU GROUNDED FOR THIS AND YOU KNOW IT. ANY MORE OF YOUR DISOBEDIENCE AND YOU'LL NEVER TAKE UP ANOTHER KITE. NOW GET OUT!

AS PATTERSON STORMED FROM THE CABIN, PETER COULD NOT HELP WONDERING IF HE HAD DONE THE RIGHT THING . . .
SHOULD I HAVE BLOWN HIM UP LIKE THAT? HE'S A GOOD PILOT FOR ALL HIS FAULTS. BUT MAYBE HE'LL SEE SENSE NOW BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE.

THAT NIGHT, THE STORM THAT HAD THREATENED DURING THE PREVIOUS DAY FINALLY BROKE. THE GIANT CARRIER HEAVED AND ROLLED VIOLENTLY AS THE WAVES BATTERED HER. PETER THOMAS FOUND IT HARD TO SLEEP . . .
THIS FEELS LIKE A REAL BLOW. I'D BETTER CHECK THE AIRCRAFT . . .

AS HE NEARED THE FLIGHT DECK, A COLD WIND SWEPT THE STEEL CORRIDOR – AND HE QUICKENED HIS PACE . . .
I KNEW IT! SOME FOOL'S LEFT A BULKHEAD OPEN I'LL HAVE HIS NECK IF I FIND HIM!

HE STEPPED OUT ON TO THE GALE-SWEPT FLIGHT DECK TO LOOK AROUND – AND SOME SIXTH SENSE MADE HIM GLANCE UPWARDS.
HEY! WHAT THE . . .?

A PILOT'S REFLEXES MUST BE LIGHTNING FAST— AND THIS TIME THEY SAVED HIM FROM A BROKEN SKULL. THE HEAVY CAN OF GREASE MISSED HIM BY INCHES.

FOR A BRIEF SECOND HE LAY PANTING FROM THE SHOCK OF HIS ESCAPE. THEN HE HEARD THE URGENT SCRAPING OF FEET HASTENING DOWN A LADDER...
WHOEVER IT WAS— THEY'RE CLEARING OFF — FAST!

SCRAMBLING TO HIS FEET, PETER GAVE CHASE . . .
HEY! COME BACK, YOU CRAZY FOOL!

HE MUST HAVE REACHED THE CORRIDOR ONLY SECONDS AFTER THE FUGITIVE — BUT THERE WAS NO-ONE TO BE SEEN.
HANG IT! MISSED HIM...

HE KNEW IT WAS NO USE LOOKING ANY FURTHER. AN AIRCRAFT CARRIER IS LIKE A CITY AFLOAT — AND, LIKE A CITY, IT HAS A THOUSAND HIDING-PLACES . . .
IT'S HOPELESS! I'LL NEVER FIND THE MURDERING RAT!

THEN [illegible] OVERTOOK HIM AND HIS LEGS SUDDENLY FELT LIKE JELLY.
I'VE GOT TO TALK TO SOMEONE — OR I'LL BUST! I KNOW — DAVE . . .
DAVID HARPER

DAVE'S CHEERY VOICE CALLED OUT IN RESPONSE TO HIS KNOCK . . .
HI, THERE! HEY — YOU SEEN A GHOST OR SOMETHING?
DAVID HAR
NOT QUITE / I THINK SOMEONE JUST TRIED TO KILL ME . . .

FOR A FEW SECONDS THERE WAS A STUNNED SILENCE IN THE ROOM. THEN DAVE HARVEY SEEMED TO REALISE THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PETE'S WORDS . . .
WHAT? ARE YOU CRAZY?
NO, I'M NOT CRAZY. SOMEBODY JUST TRIED TO BRAIN ME WITH A CAN OF GREASE OUT ON THE FLIGHT DECK . . .

PETER BLURTED OUT HIS STORY BUT STILL DAVE HARVEY LOOKED HIS DISBELIEF . . .
IT MUST HAVE BEEN AN ACCIDENT! WHY SHOULD ANYONE WANT TO KILL YOU, PETE?
I DON'T KNOW BUT IT WAS DELIBERATE, ALL RIGHT. I SAW HIM, THOUGH I COULDN'T MAKE OUT WHO IT WAS.

OKAY! YOU SAW SOMEONE IT WAS A GUNNER MORE THAN LIKELY. HE'S GREASING THE GUNS, DROPS THE GREASE-CAN. HE SEES IT JUST MISS YOU AND MAKES HIMSELF SCARCE — AND I CAN'T SAY I BLAME HIM, EITHER . . .

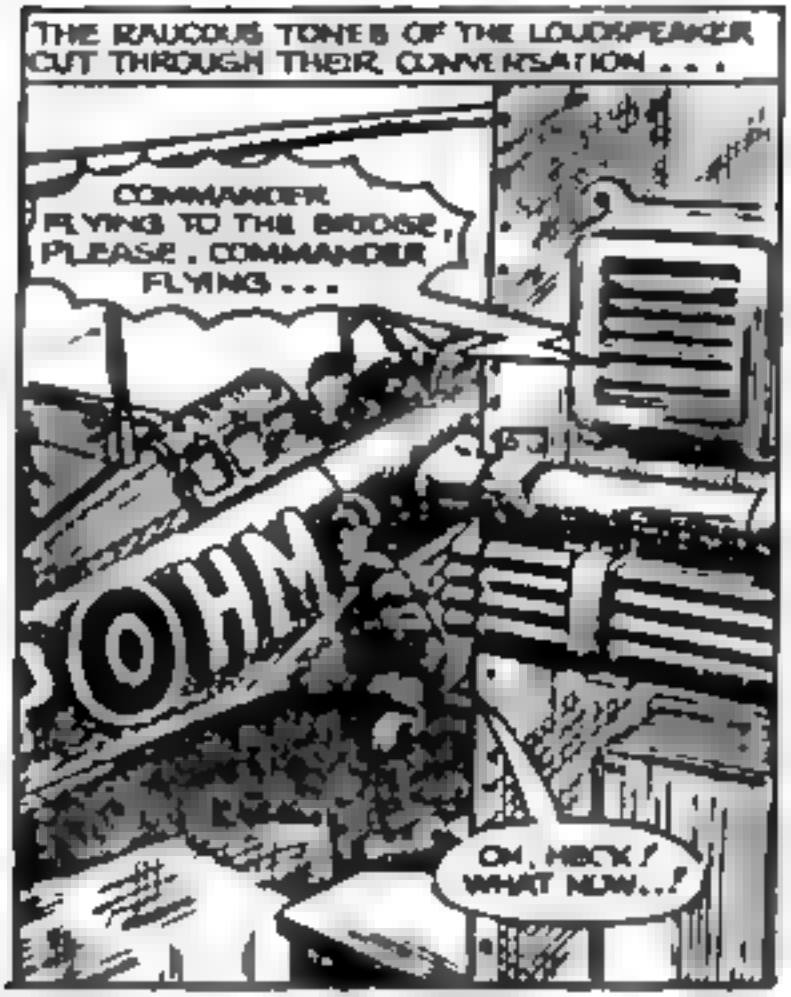
DAVE HARVEY'S EXPLANATION WAS JUST CREDIBLE, PETER HAD TO ADMIT THAT MUCH. BUT HE WAS SLOWLY FORMING HIS OWN OPINION ABOUT THE "ACCIDENT"...
I DON'T KNOW, DAVE. IT COULD HAVE BEEN AS YOU SAY BUT — WELL, I DID GIVE GEORGE PATTERSON THE ROUGH EDGE OF MY TONGUE...
NOW I KNOW YOU'RE NUTS! GEORGE MAY BE HOT HEADED - BUT MURDER? NOT ON YOUR LIFE...

IT WAS OBVIOUS DAVE HARVEY WAS FAR FROM CONVINCED AND PETER COULD NO LONGER HOLD BACK HIS DREAD SECRET.
DAVE THERE'S SOMETHING YOU DON'T KNOW. JIM BOOTH'S PRANG WAS NO ACCIDENT - IT WAS COLD BLOODED MURDER!

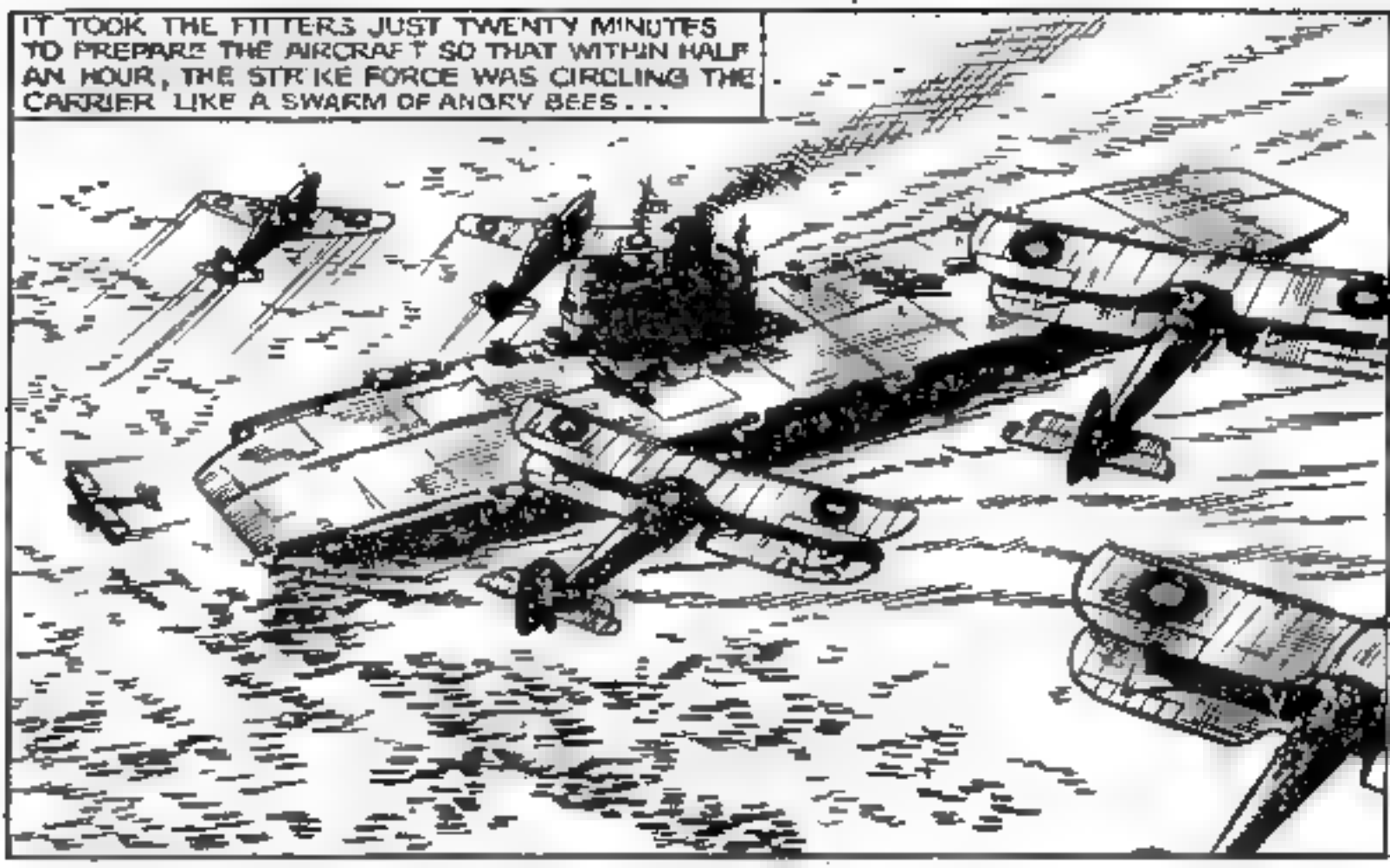
HARVEY'S EYES NARROWED, HIS VOICE HISSED THROUGH CLENCHED TEETH...
MURDER! DID YOU SAY MURDER? HAVE YOU GOT ANY PROOF?
YES — WE'VE GOT THE PROOF! NOW YOU KNOW WHY I THINK WHAT HAPPENED TONIGHT WAS NO ACCIDENT. I RECKON THE CHAP WHO KILLED JIM BOOTH IS AFTER ME!

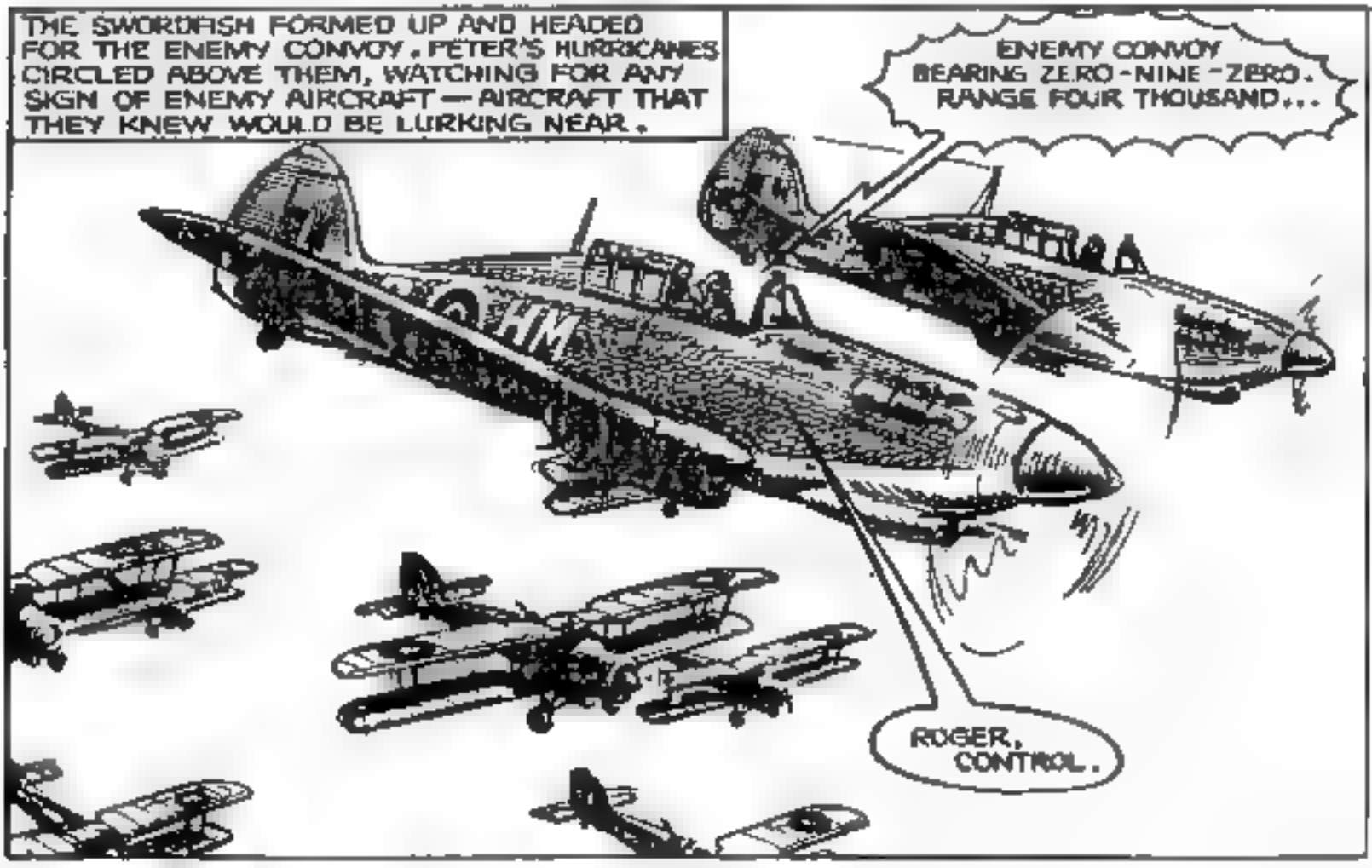
Chapter 3. *Air Strike*

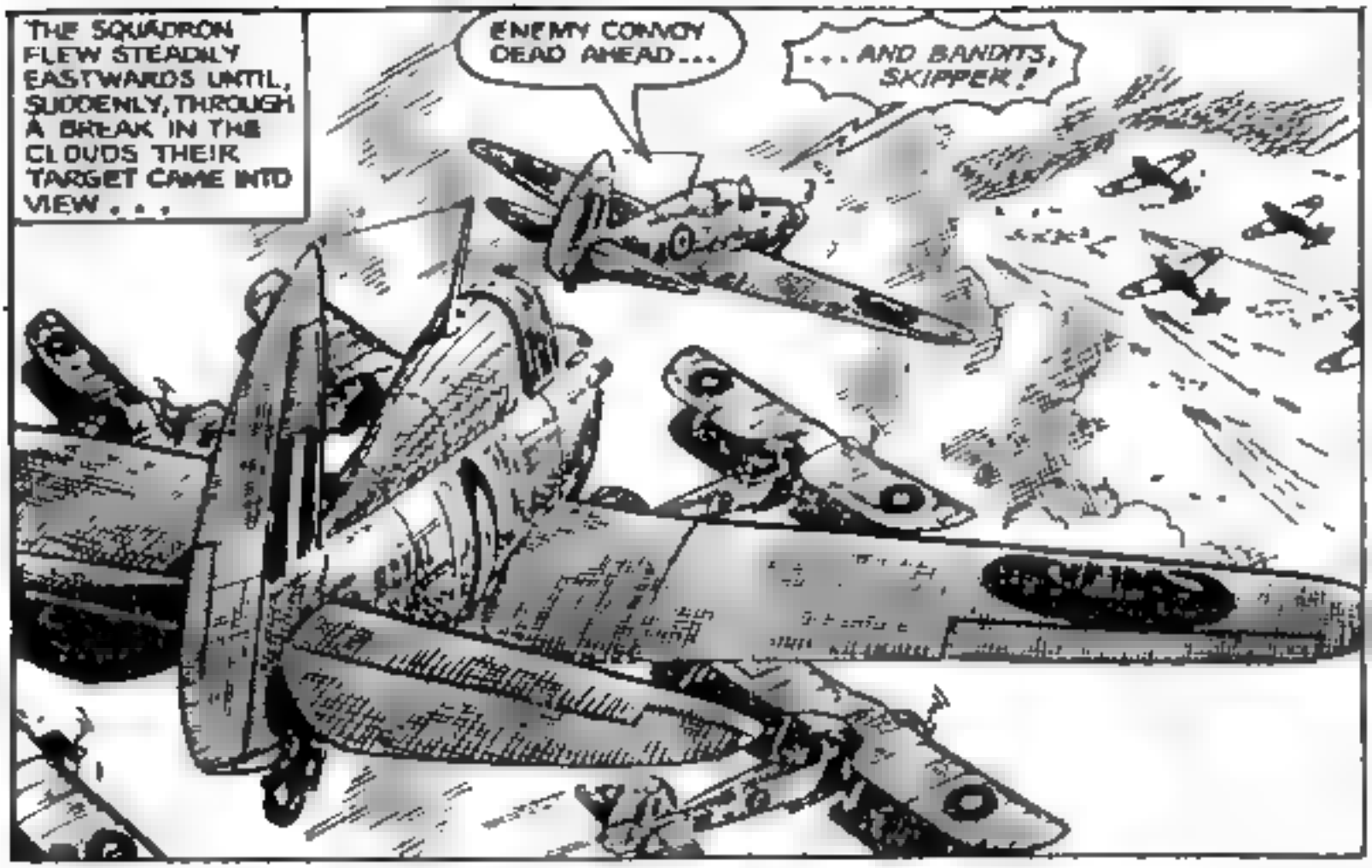
DAVE HARVEY WAS IN THE FIGHTER'S COCKPIT WHEN PETER REACHED IT.
HELLO, DAVE— NO DAMAGE DONE, I HOPE.
NO. SHE'S OKAY I'VE GIVEN HER THE ONCE OVER.


THE RAUCOUS TONES OF THE LOUDSPEAKER CUT THROUGH THEIR CONVERSATION . . .
COMMANDER FLYING TO THE BRIDGE, PLEASE. COMMANDER FLYING . . .
OHM
OH, HECK! WHAT NOW . . . ?

THE CAPTAIN WAS WAITING FOR HIM AS PETER THOMAS CLIMBED TO THE BRIDGE. THERE WAS A GRIM LOOK IN HIS EYE . . .
AH, WINGS! WE'VE GOT WIND OF A CONVOY HEADING FOR NORTH AFRICA. WE'RE MAKING FULL STEAM NOW AND SHOULD SIGHT THEM IN ABOUT FOUR HOURS. THINK YOU CAN FLY IN THIS WEATHER?
I THINK SO, SIR. GIVE ME THE GEN AND I'LL BRIEF THE LADS . . .

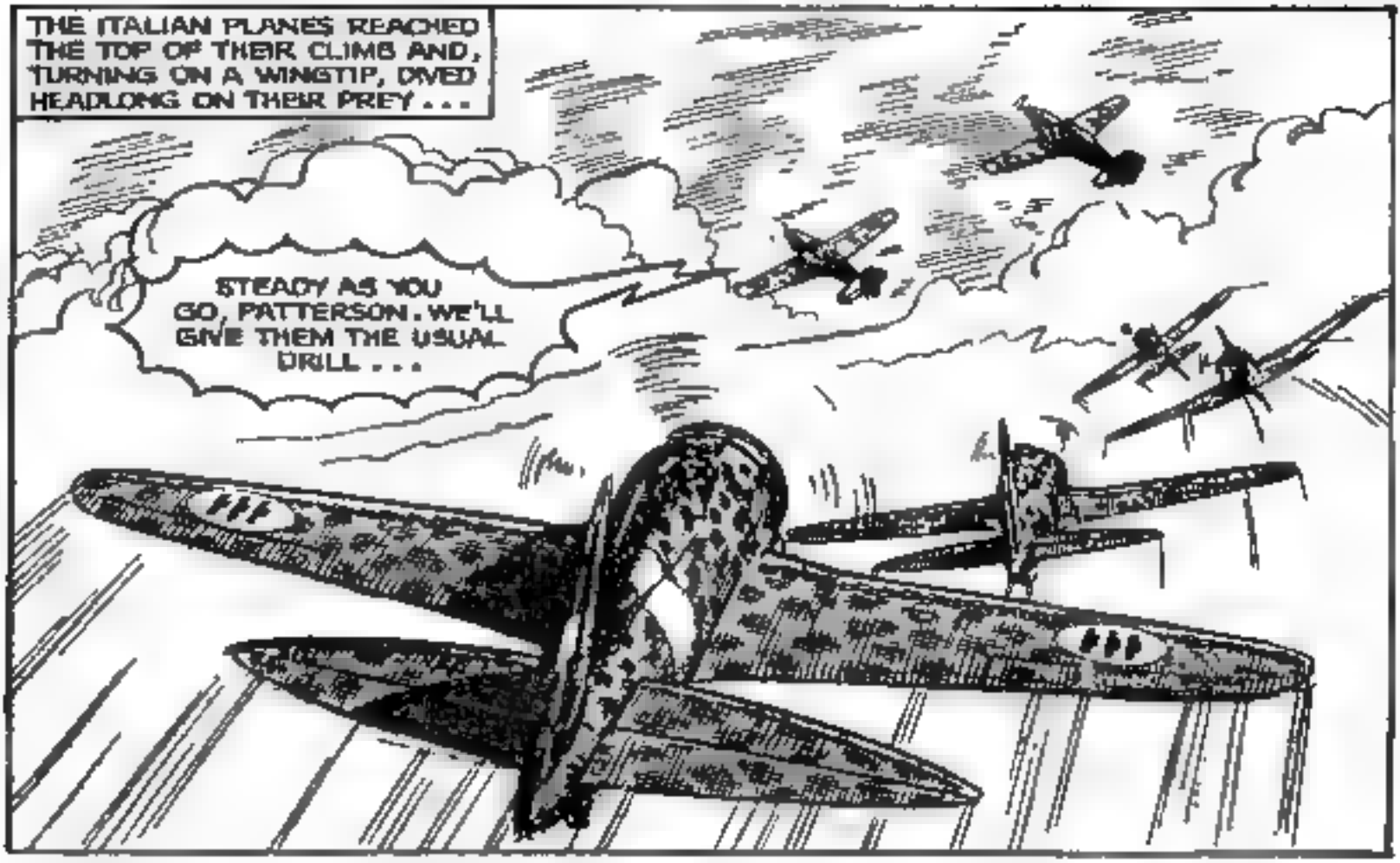

IT TOOK THE FITTERS JUST TWENTY MINUTES TO PREPARE THE AIRCRAFT SO THAT WITHIN HALF AN HOUR, THE STRIKE FORCE WAS CIRCLING THE CARRIER LIKE A SWARM OF ANGRY BEES...

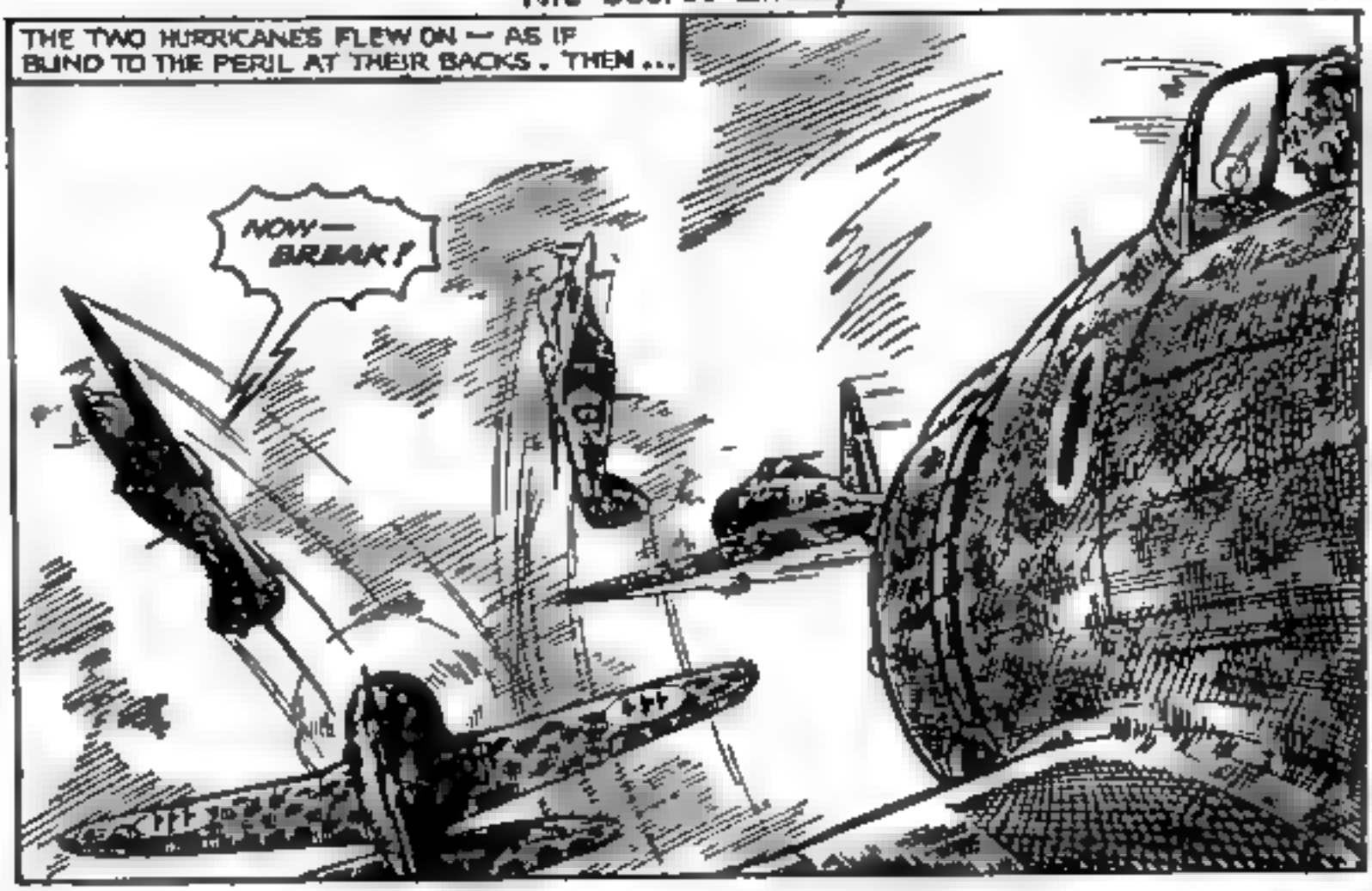

THE SWORDFISH FORMED UP AND HEADED FOR THE ENEMY CONVOY. PETER'S HURRICANES CIRCLED ABOVE THEM, WATCHING FOR ANY SIGN OF ENEMY AIRCRAFT — AIRCRAFT THAT THEY KNEW WOULD BE LURKING NEAR.
ENEMY CONVOY BEARING ZERO-NINE-ZERO. RANGE FOUR THOUSAND...
ROGER, CONTROL.

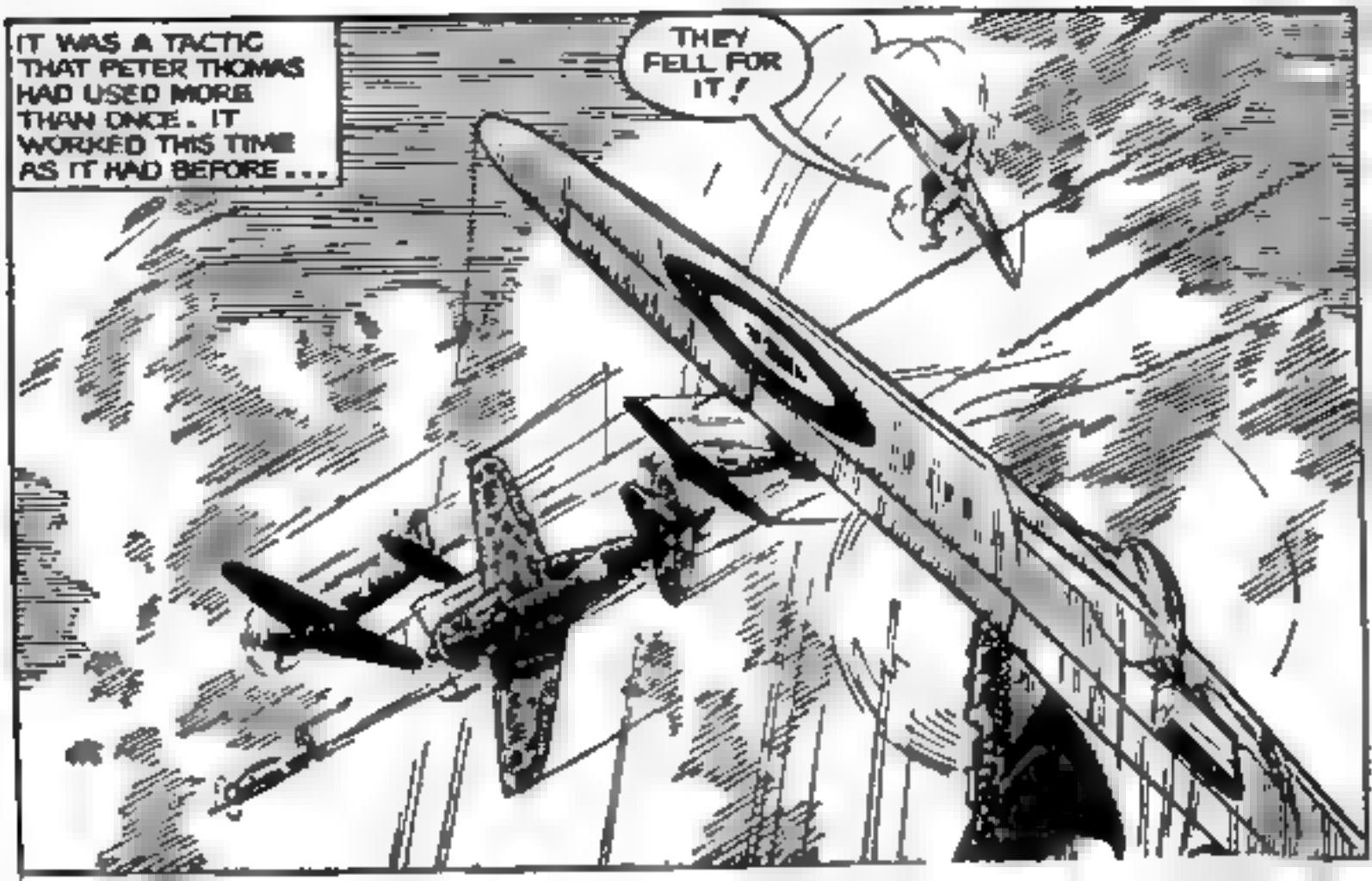

THE SQUADRON FLEW STEADILY EASTWARDS UNTIL, SUDDENLY, THROUGH A BREAK IN THE CLOUDS THEIR TARGET CAME INTO VIEW . . .
ENEMY CONVOY DEAD AHEAD . . .
. . . AND BANDITS, SKIPPER!

THE ENEMY AIRCRAFT ALMOST INSTANTLY WHEELED TO MEET THE APPROACHING MENACE AND AS THE ATTACKERS CAME WITHIN RANGE OF THE SHIPS' GUNS, A BARRAGE OF STEEL CAME UP TO MEET THEM . . .
ALL SWORDFISH TO ATTACK INDEPENDENTLY. WE'LL KEEP THE FIGHTERS OFF YOUR NECKS. GOOD LUCK!

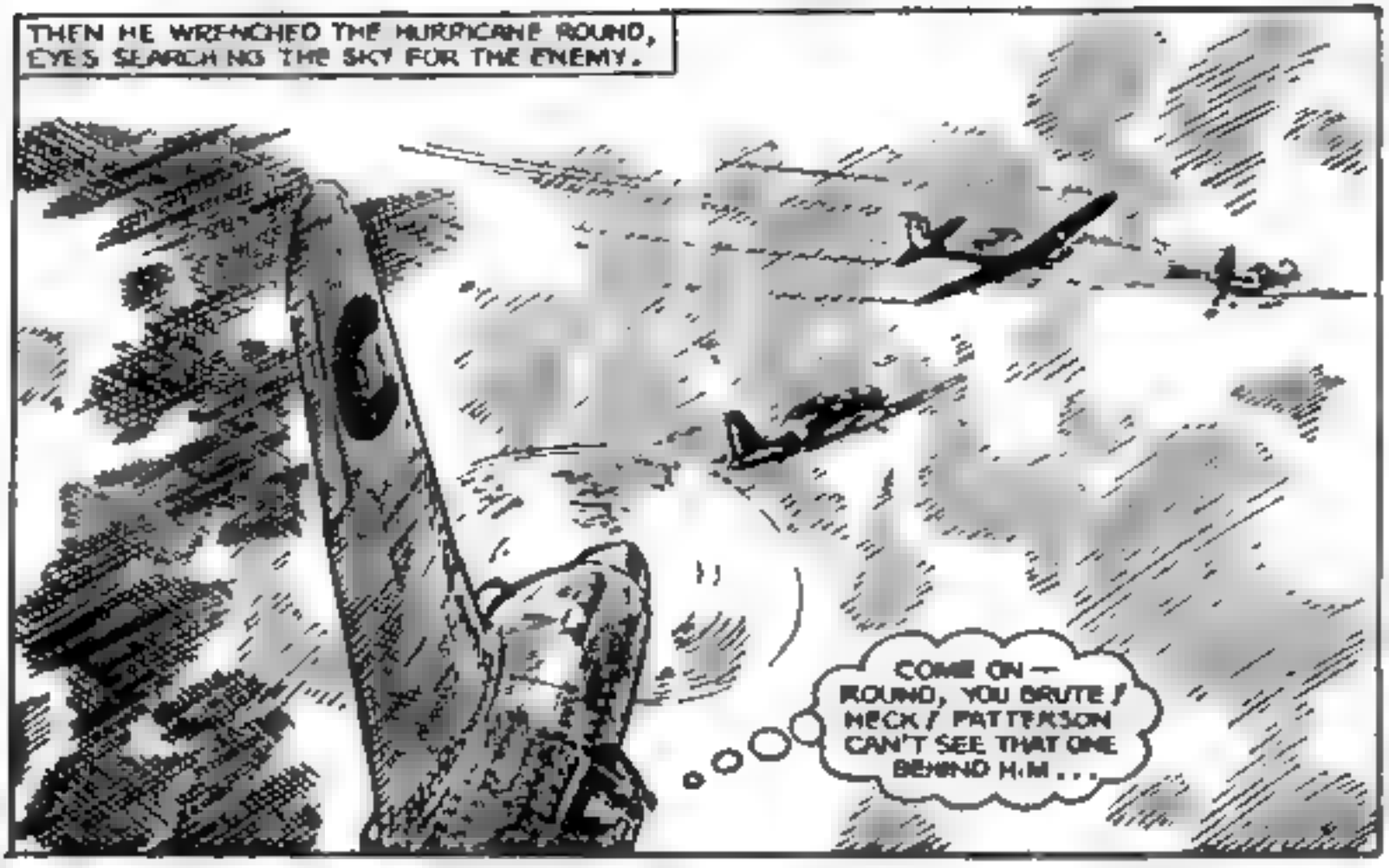
THE ITALIAN FIGHTERS WERE CLIMBING HARD AND FAST TOWARDS THE TWO HURRICANES WHICH WERE ENDEAVOURING TO GET ABOVE THEM . . .
HERE THEY COME, SKIPPER!
ROGER, RED-TWO! PREPARE FOR EVASIVE ACTION...

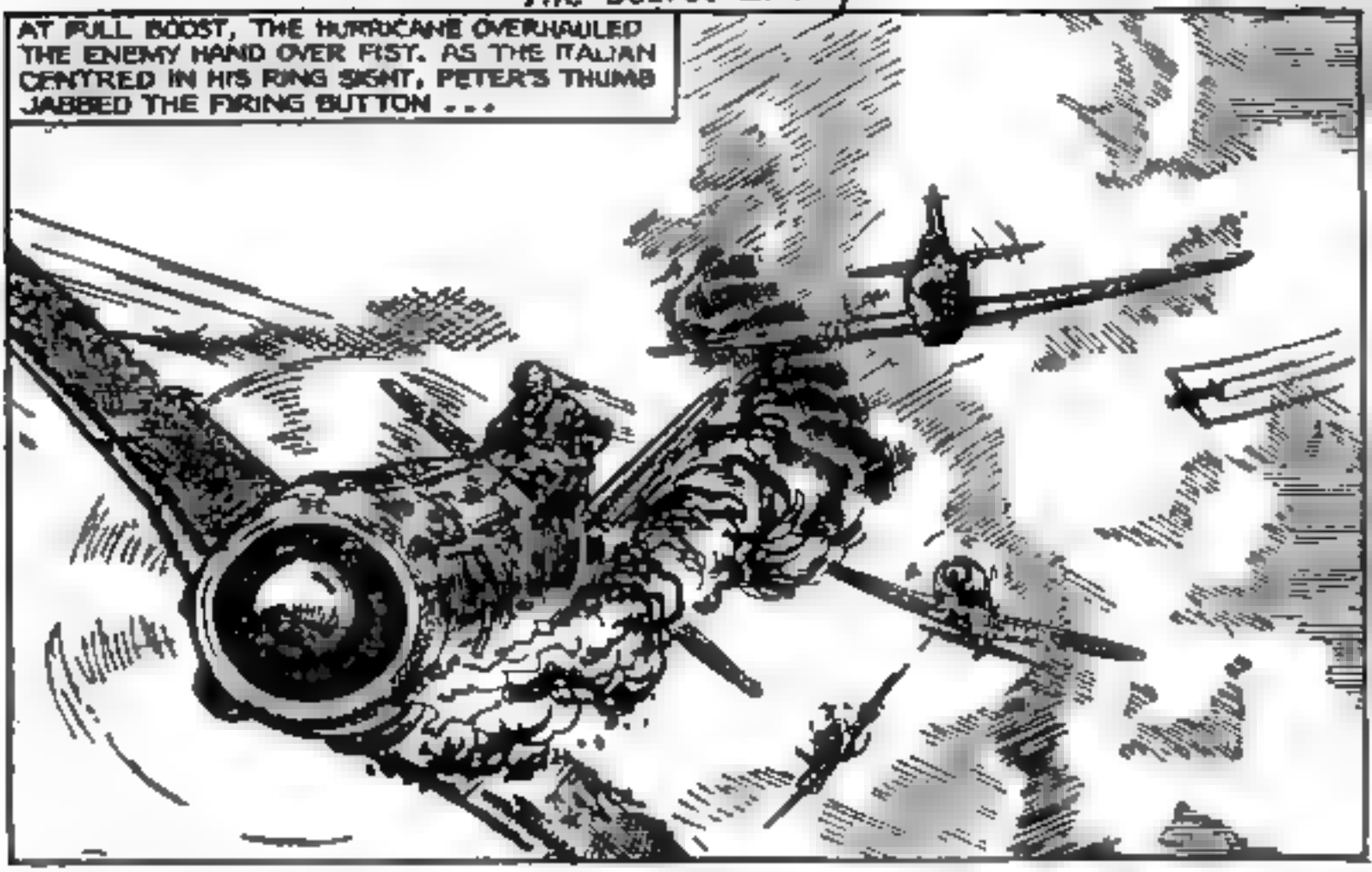

THE ITALIAN PLANES REACHED THE TOP OF THEIR CLIMB AND, TURNING ON A WINGTIP, DIVED HEADLONG ON THEIR PREY . . .
STEADY AS YOU GO, PATTERSON. WE'LL GIVE THEM THE USUAL DRILL . . .

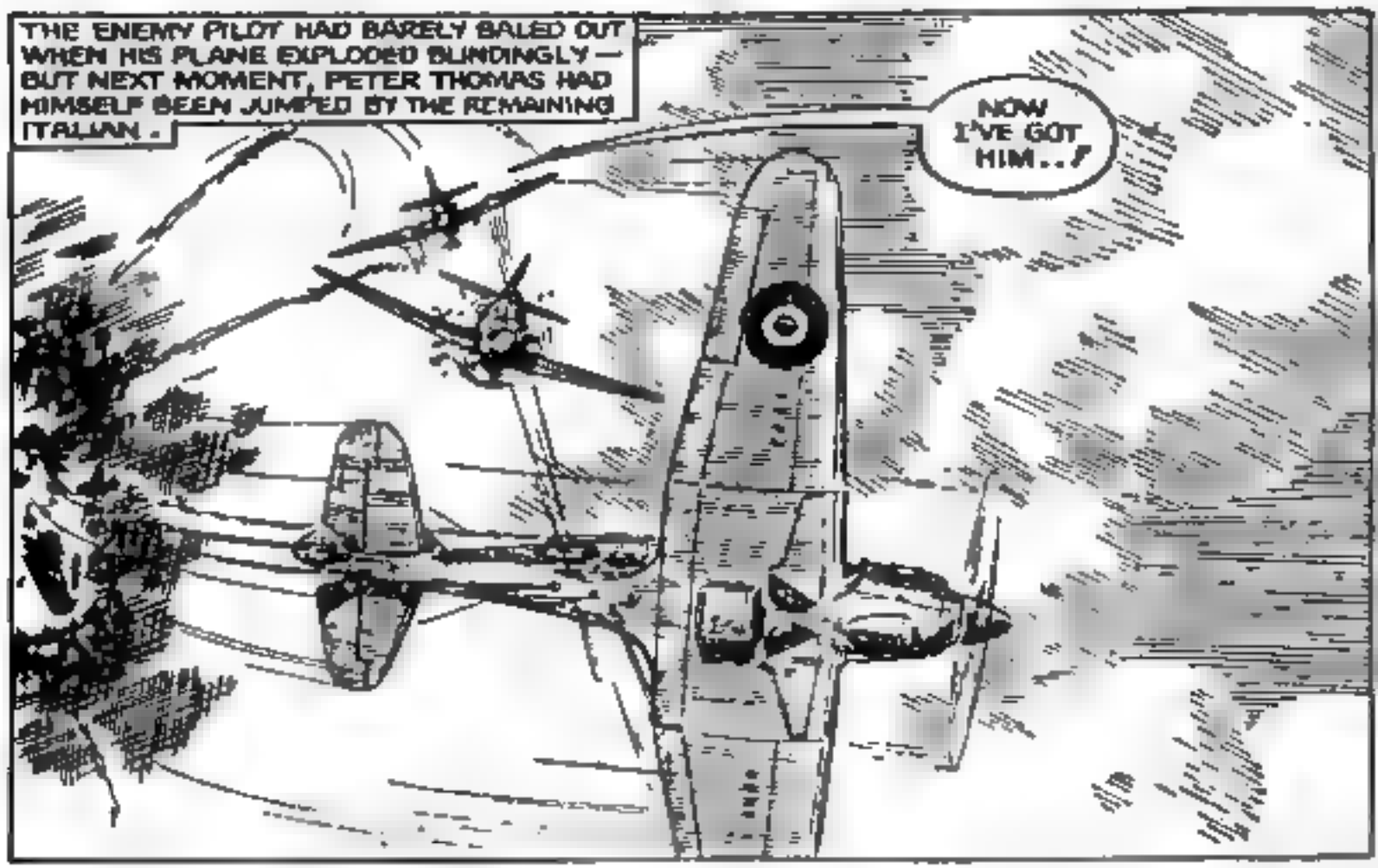

THE TWO HURRICANES FLEW ON — AS IF BLIND TO THE PERIL AT THEIR BACKS . THEN ...
NOW— BREAK!


IT WAS A TACTIC THAT PETER THOMAS HAD USED MORE THAN ONCE . IT WORKED THIS TIME AS IT HAD BEFORE ...
THEY FELL FOR IT!

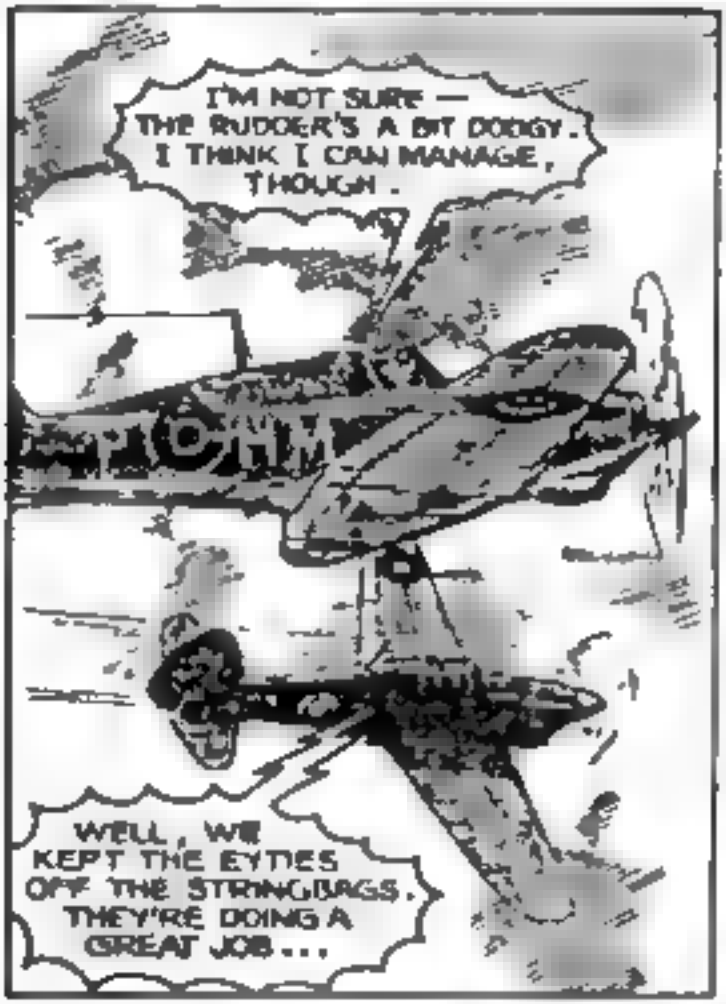
A RAKING BURST FROM PETER'S GUNS SENT ONE OF THE SLOWER ENEMY FLAMING TOWARDS THE SEA...


THEN HE WRENCHED THE HURRICANE ROUND, EYES SEARCHING THE SKY FOR THE ENEMY.
COME ON — ROUND, YOU BRUTE! NECK! PATTERSON CAN'T SEE THAT ONE BEHIND HIM...

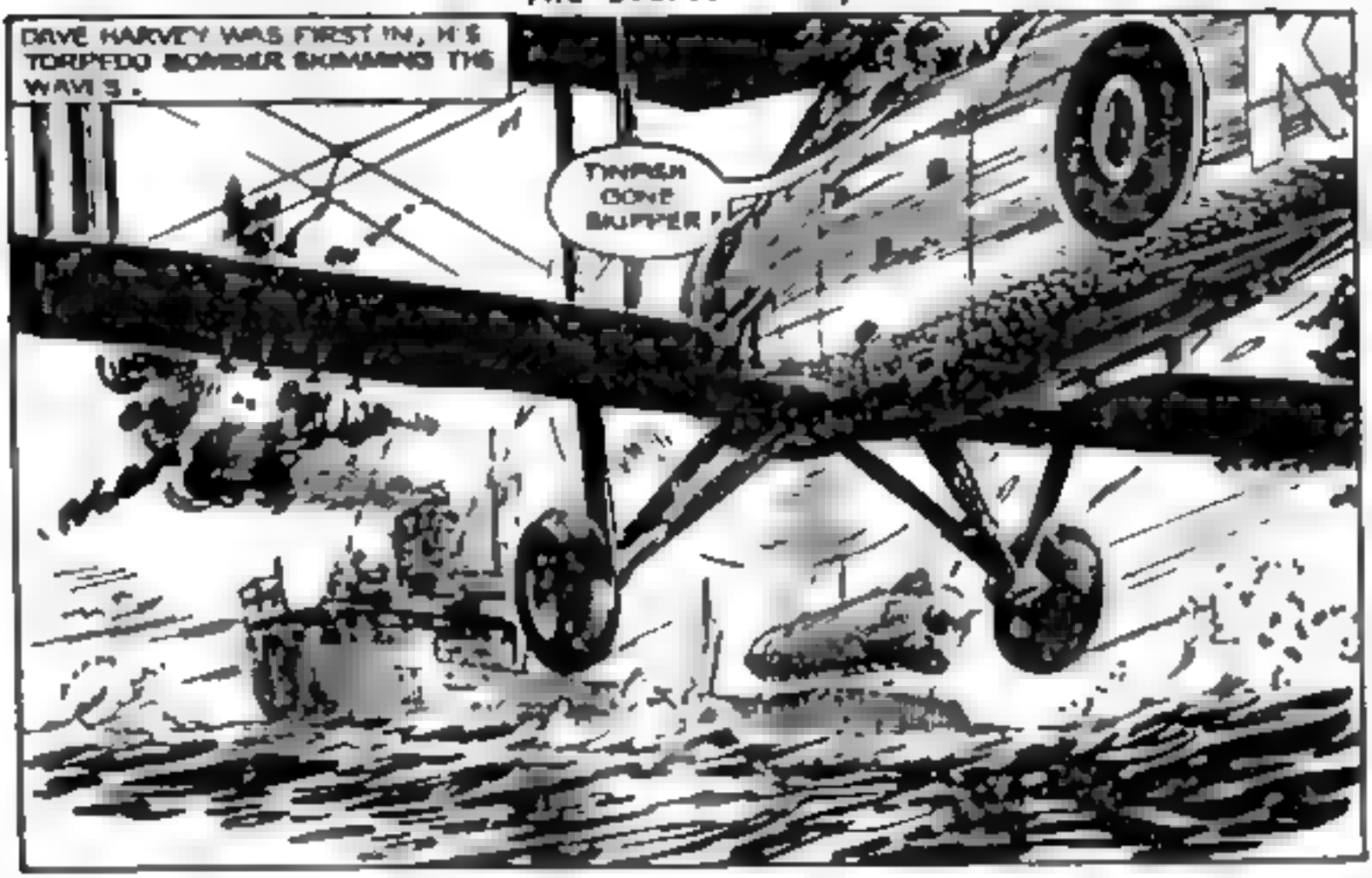

AT FULL BOOST, THE HURRICANE OVERHAULED THE ENEMY HAND OVER FIST. AS THE ITALIAN CENTRED IN HIS RING SIGHT, PETER'S THUMB JABBED THE FIRING BUTTON . . .


THE ENEMY PILOT HAD BARELY BALED OUT WHEN HIS PLANE EXPLODED BLINDINGLY — BUT NEXT MOMENT, PETER THOMAS HAD HIMSELF BEEN JUMPED BY THE REMAINING ITALIAN .
NOW I'VE GOT HIM . . !

PATTERSON'S CONE OF FIRE SWEPT THE FIAT FROM THE SKY—AND WENT ON TO RAKE ALONG HIS LEADER'S FUSELAGE. PATTERSON DIED THEN
DOPPER! YOU ALL RIGHT? THE EYTIE GOT IN A BURST BEFORE I NAILED H.M...

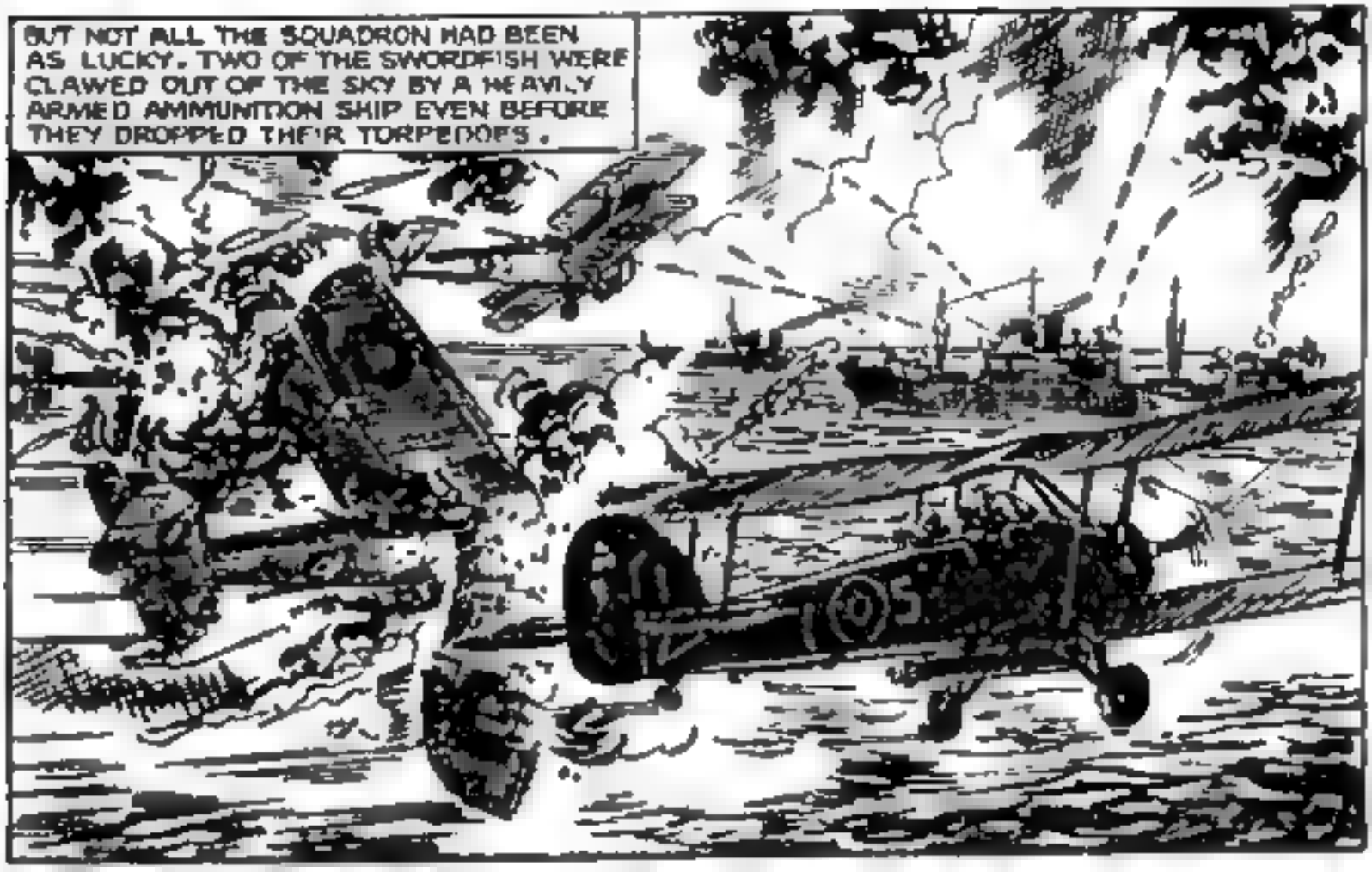

I'M NOT SURE — THE RUDDER'S A BIT DODGY. I THINK I CAN MANAGE, THOUGH.
WELL, WE KEPT THE EYTIES OFF THE STRINGBAGS. THEY'RE DOING A GREAT JOB...

NONE OF THE SWORDFISH PILOTS HAD EYES FOR THE AERIAL BATTLE ABOVE THEM. NERVES TAUT, THEY HELD THEIR COURSE GALLANTLY AS FLAME AND STEEL SAVAGED THE AIR ABOUT THEM...

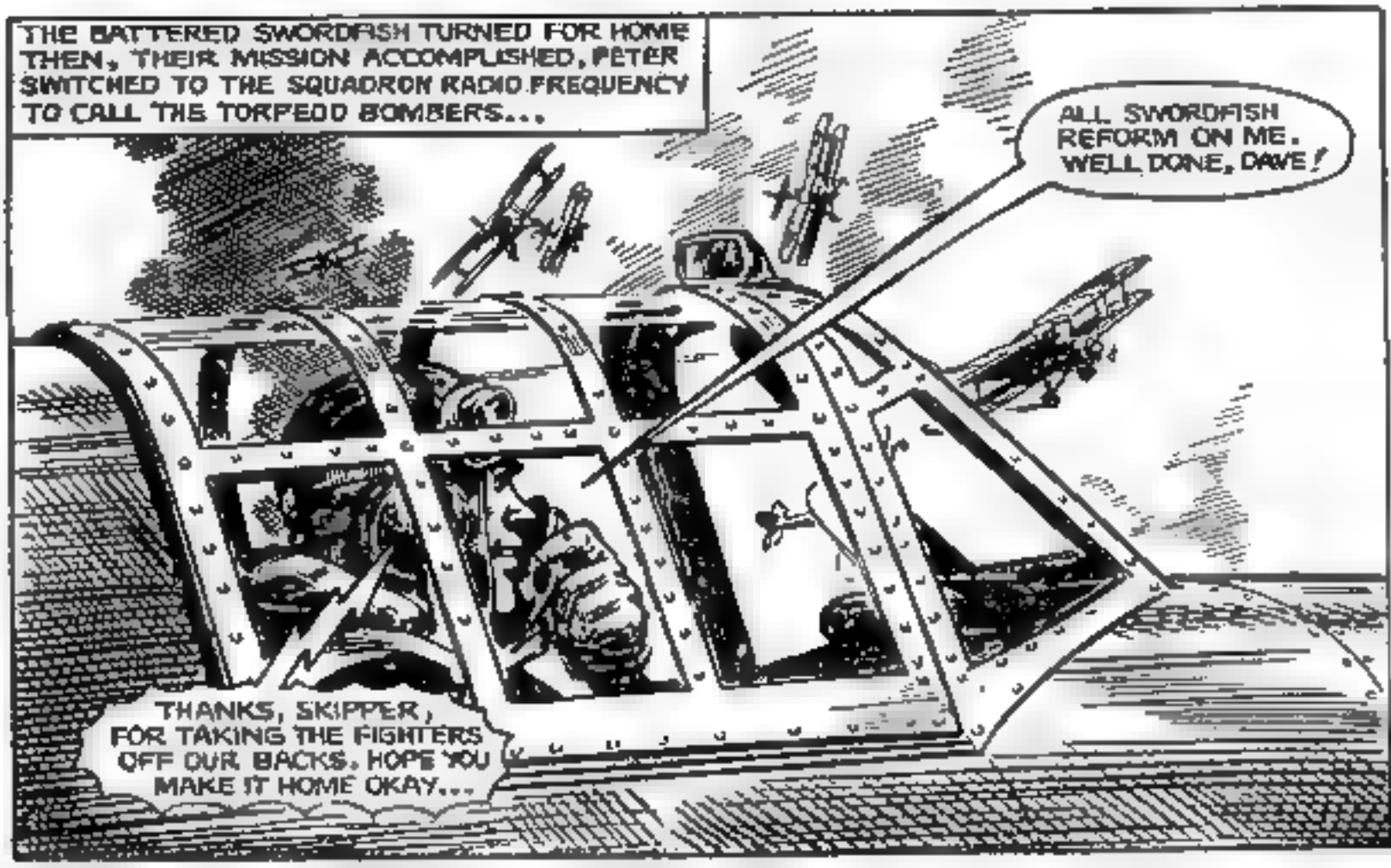

DAVE HARVEY WAS FIRST IN, HIS TORPEDO BOMBER SKIMMING THE WAVES.
TINFISH GONE BUPPER!

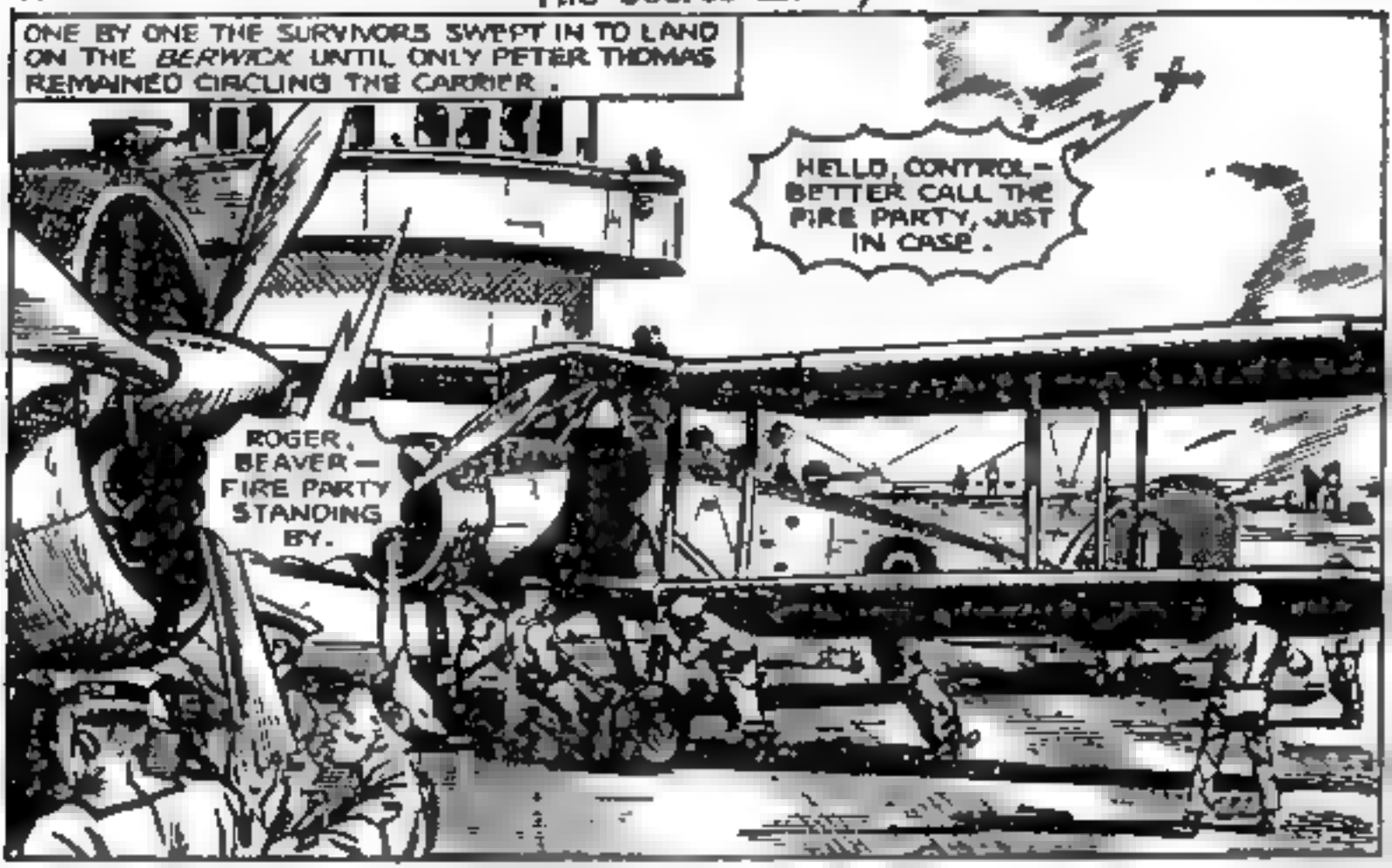
THE TORPEDO WAS RUNNING STRAIGHT AND TRUE, IT'S WAKE AN ARROW OF FOAM POINTING STRAIGHT AT THE HEART OF THE TANKER. THEN DAVE HARVEY THREW THE SWORDFISH HARD OVER . . .

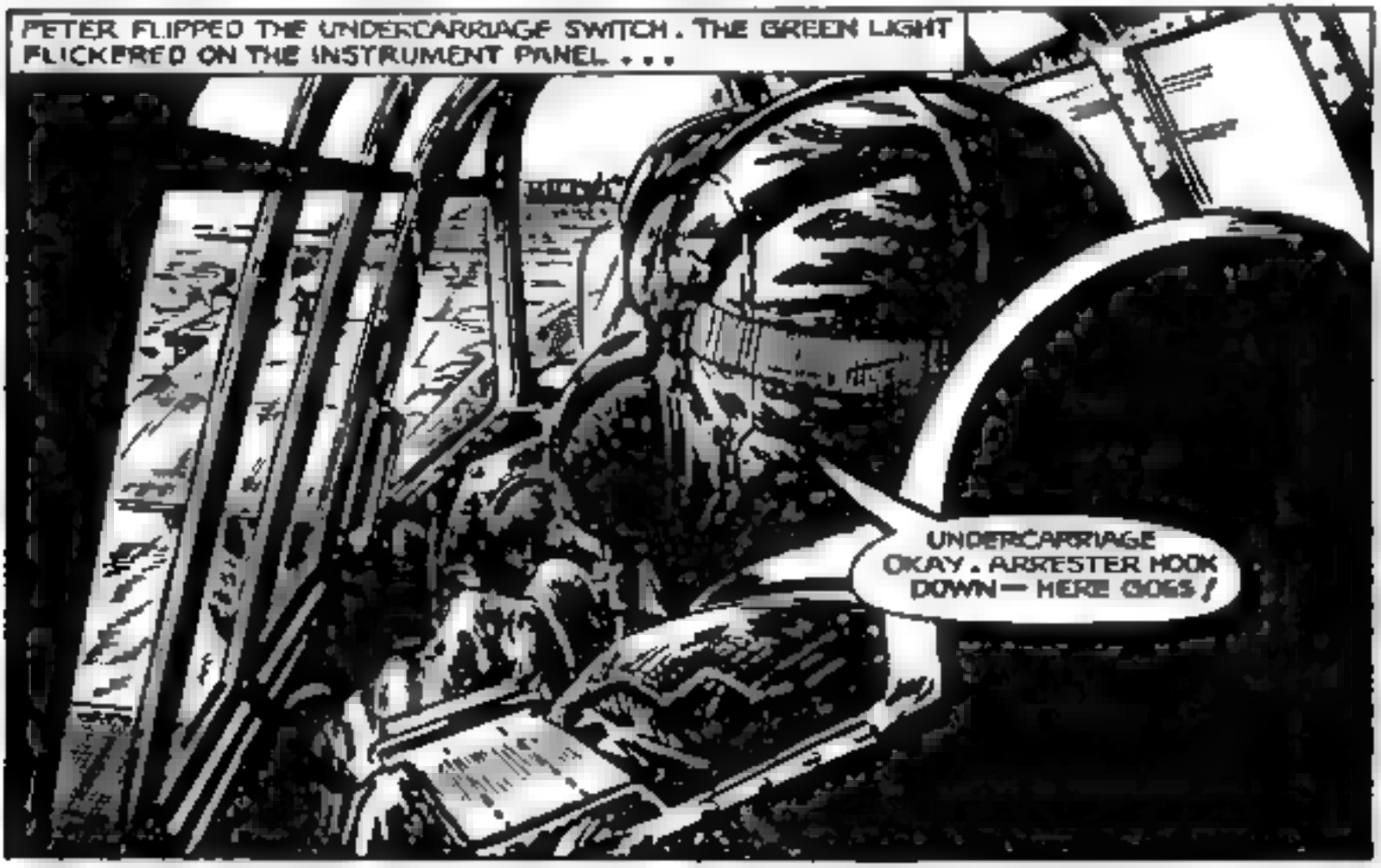
THE MISSILE STRUCK HOME. WITH AN EAR-SPLITTING ROAR AND A BLINDING FLASH, THE WARHEAD EXPLODED.
WOW! LOOK AT HER GO...

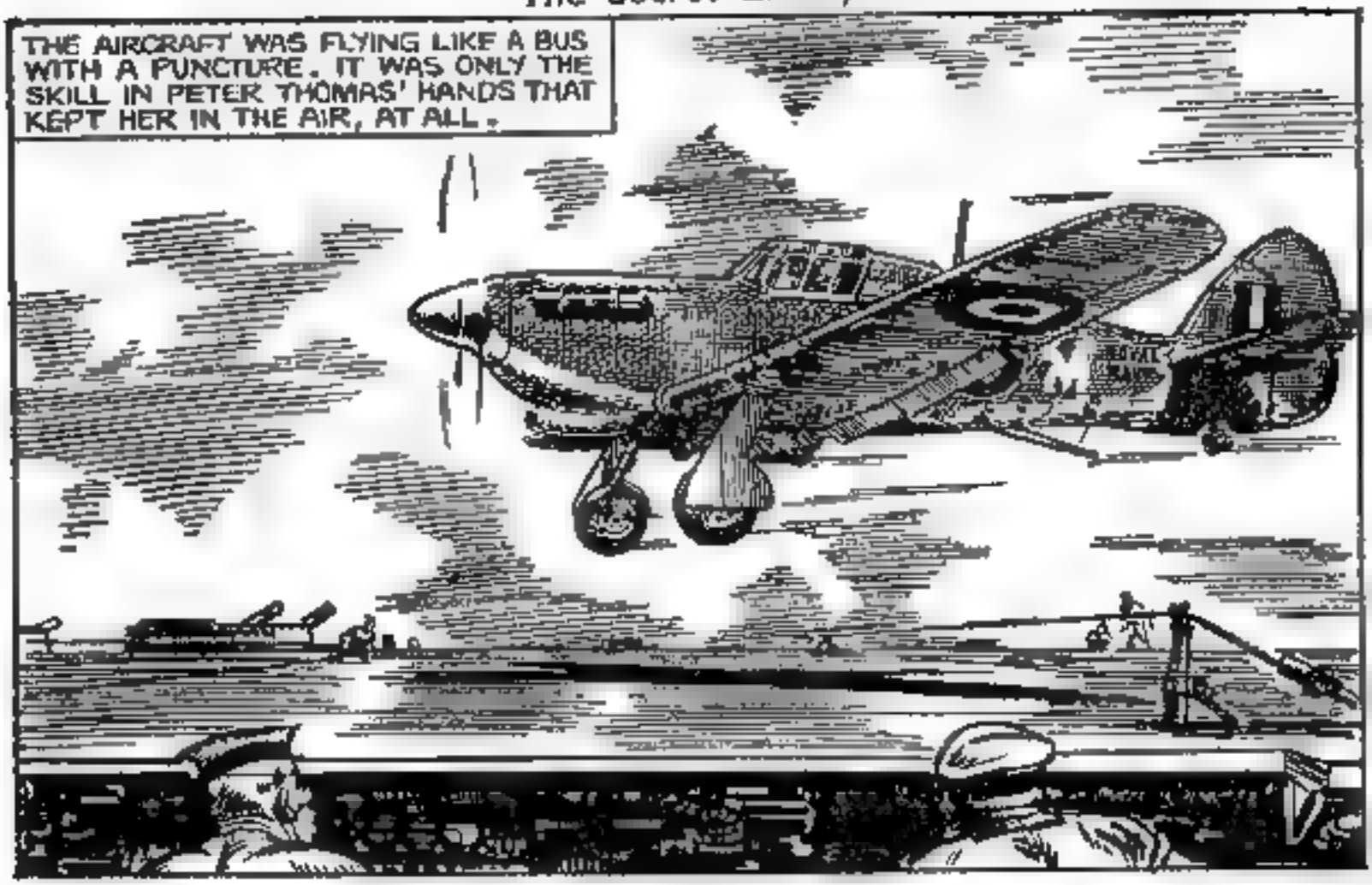

BUT NOT ALL THE SQUADRON HAD BEEN AS LUCKY. TWO OF THE SWORDFISH WERE CLAWED OUT OF THE SKY BY A HEAVILY ARMED AMMUNITION SHIP EVEN BEFORE THEY DROPPED THEIR TORPEDOES.

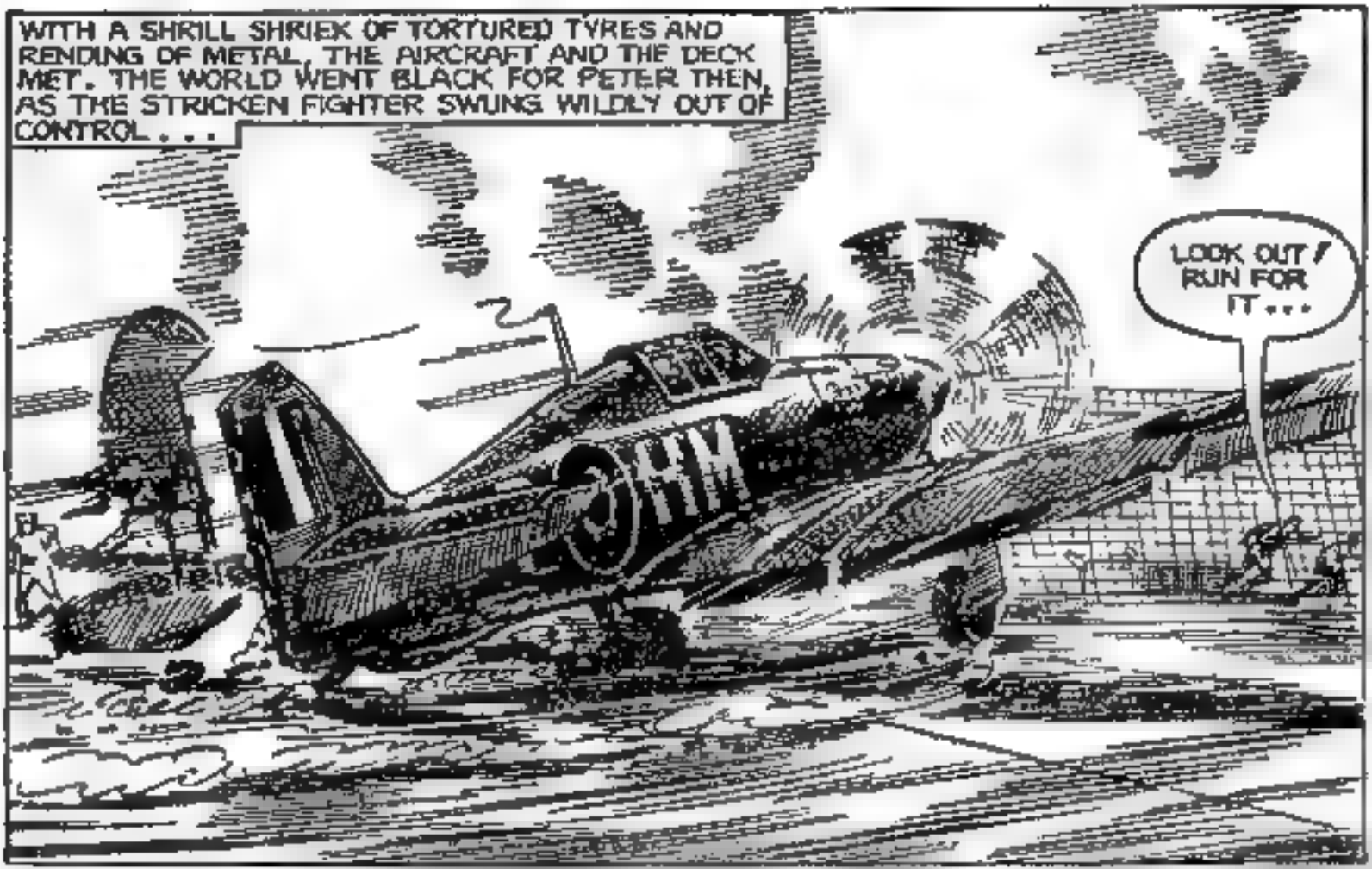
BUT THAT VESSEL WAS NOT TO ESCAPE ITS DOOM. ANOTHER UNDERWATER MISSILE STRUCK THE SHIP AMIDSHIPS, AND THE ITALIAN'S HIGH EXPLOSIVE CARGO ERUPTED LIKE A VOLCANO.


THE BATTERED SWORDFISH TURNED FOR HOME THEN, THEIR MISSION ACCOMPLISHED, PETER SWITCHED TO THE SQUADRON RADIO FREQUENCY TO CALL THE TORPEDO BOMBERS...
ALL SWORDFISH REFORM ON ME. WELL DONE, DAVE!
THANKS, SKIPPER, FOR TAKING THE FIGHTERS OFF OUR BACKS. HOPE YOU MAKE IT HOME OKAY...


ONE BY ONE THE SURVIVORS SWEPT IN TO LAND ON THE *BERWICK* UNTIL ONLY PETER THOMAS REMAINED CIRCLING THE CARRIER.
HELLO, CONTROL— BETTER CALL THE FIRE PARTY, JUST IN CASE.
ROGER, BEAVER— FIRE PARTY STANDING BY.


PETER FLIPPED THE UNDERCARRIAGE SWITCH. THE GREEN LIGHT FLICKERED ON THE INSTRUMENT PANEL...
UNDERCARRIAGE OKAY. ARRESTER HOOK DOWN— HERE GOES!


THE AIRCRAFT WAS FLYING LIKE A BUS WITH A PUNCTURE. IT WAS ONLY THE SKILL IN PETER THOMAS' HANDS THAT KEPT HER IN THE AIR, AT ALL.

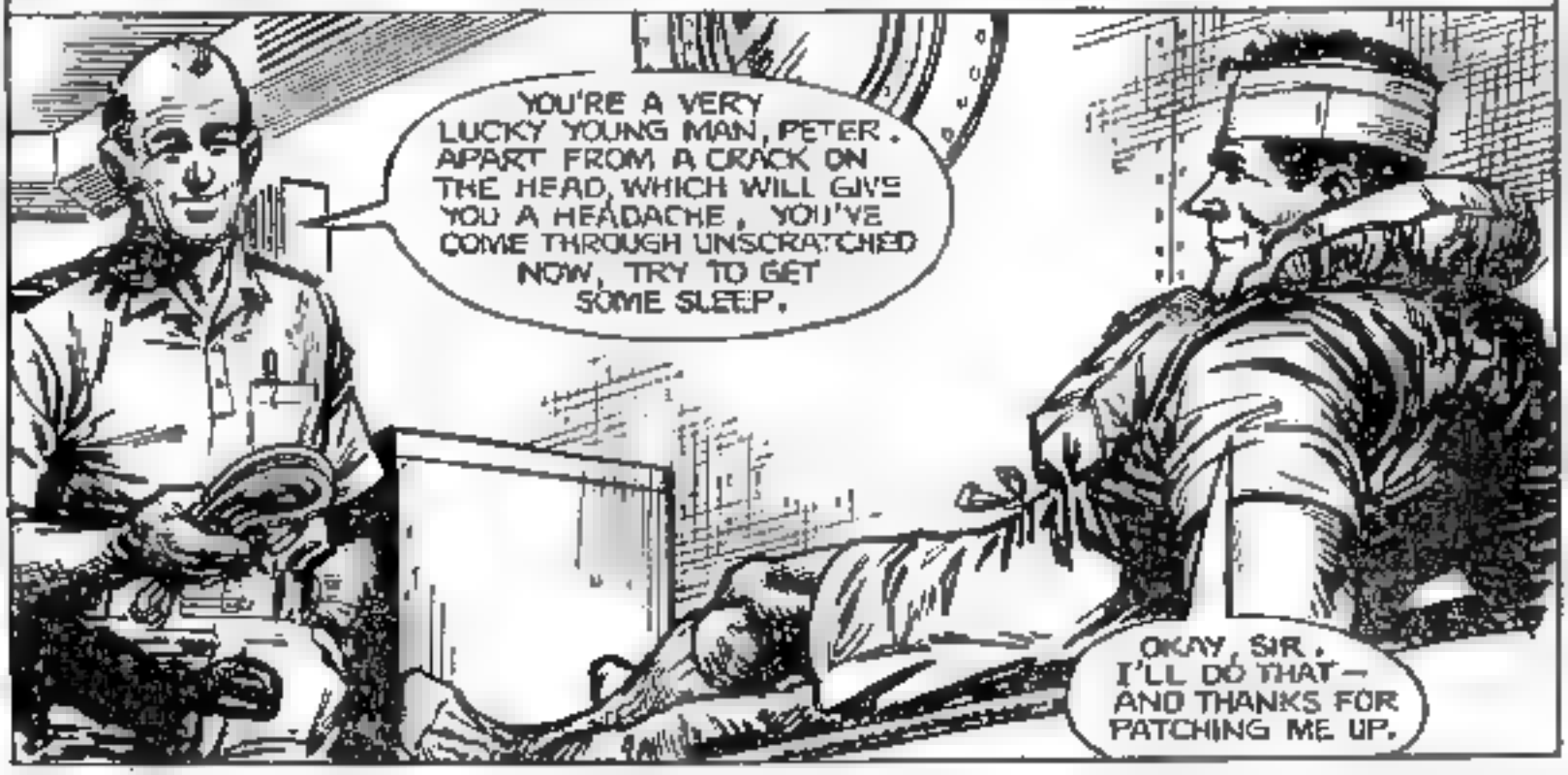

WITH A SHRILL SHRIEK OF TORTURED TYRES AND RENDING OF METAL, THE AIRCRAFT AND THE DECK MET. THE WORLD WENT BLACK FOR PETER THEN, AS THE STRICKEN FIGHTER SWUNG WILDLY OUT OF CONTROL...
LOOK OUT! RUN FOR IT...

IT PLOUGHED INTO THE CRASH BARRIER, SHREDDING PIECES OF FUSELAGE AND UNDERCARRIAGE.
FIRE PARTY, ON THE DOUBLE...
THE TAILPLANE ROSE HIGH INTO THE AIR ONLY TO BE THUMPED BACK TO THE DECK AS IF BY AN INVISIBLE HAND...

WITHIN SECONDS, WILLING HANDS WERE PULLING THE LIMP FORM OF THE PILOT FROM THE WRECKAGE
WE'VE GOT HIM, CHIEF—HE'S STILL ALIVE!
GET HIM AWAY FROM HERE – SHE COULD GO UP ANY SECOND.

Chapter 4. The Killer

PETER THOMAS CAME ROUND IN THE SICK QUARTERS, ACHING IN EVERY LIMB AND WITH A BANDAGE WRAPPED ROUND HIS HEAD . . .



BUT PETER COULD NOT SLEEP, FOR HIS NARROW ESCAPE FROM DEATH HAD AFFECTED HIS NERVES MORE THAN HE THOUGHT THEN HE HAD A VISITOR . . .

THERE WAS A DEADLY SERIOUSNESS IN THE OLDER MAN'S FACE THAT DISPELLED ALL THOUGHTS OF SLEEP.

THE CHIEF HELD OUT A GNARLED HAND AND NESTLING IN THE PALM, PETER SAW THE STUBBY REMAINS OF SPENT BULLETS . . .
I'M NOT SURPRISED, CHIEF – SOME EYTIE NEARLY GAVE ME THE CHOP WITH THOSE. THANKS, I'LL KEEP THEM AS A SOUVENIR...
BUT THESE ARE THREE-O-THREE ROUNDS, SIR – NO ITALIAN GUNS WOULD CARRY THESE!
PETER SAT STUNNED. BUT BEFORE HE COULD SAY ANYTHING, THE CHIEF WENT ON AND WHAT HE HEARD, SENT A CHILL OF FEAR THROUGH THE YOUNG PILOT . . .
. . . AND THAT'S NOT ALL, SIR. YOUR RUDDER BAR WAS HALF SAWN THROUGH – JUST LIKE MISTER BOOTH'S...

FOR A MOMENT OR TWO PETER THOMAS WONDERED IF HE WAS DREAMING. ONE LOOK AT THE CHIEF'S FACE CONVINCED HIM OTHERWISE . . .
THEN IF WHAT YOU SAY IS TRUE, CHIEF, WHOEVER KILLED BOOTH MEANT TO GET ME THE SAME WAY YOU'RE SURE OF YOUR FACTS?
YES SIR — I'D SWEAR TO IT, IF NEED BE.

PETER SAT WEARILY ON THE EDGE OF THE BUNK, HIS MIND IN TURMOIL. HE STARED AT THE BULLETS AND SUDDENLY, AS IF A CLOSED DOOR HAD BEEN MAGICALLY THROWN OPEN, HE KNEW THE SOLUTION . . .
THERE WAS ONLY ONE OTHER HURRICANE UP TODAY, SO WHAT OTHER ANSWER CAN THERE BE...

GEORGE PATTERSON JUMPED UP AS HIS CABIN DOOR WAS FLUNG OPEN. THERE WAS MENACE IN PETER THOMAS' EYES AND A DOZEN SPENT ROUNDS IN HIS FIST . . .
WHAT THE— SKIPPER! SHOULDN'T YOU BE RESTING?
CUT OUT THE PLEASANTRIES, PATTERSON. THEY DUG THESE OUT OF MY HURRICANE— THEY'RE THREE-O-THREES!

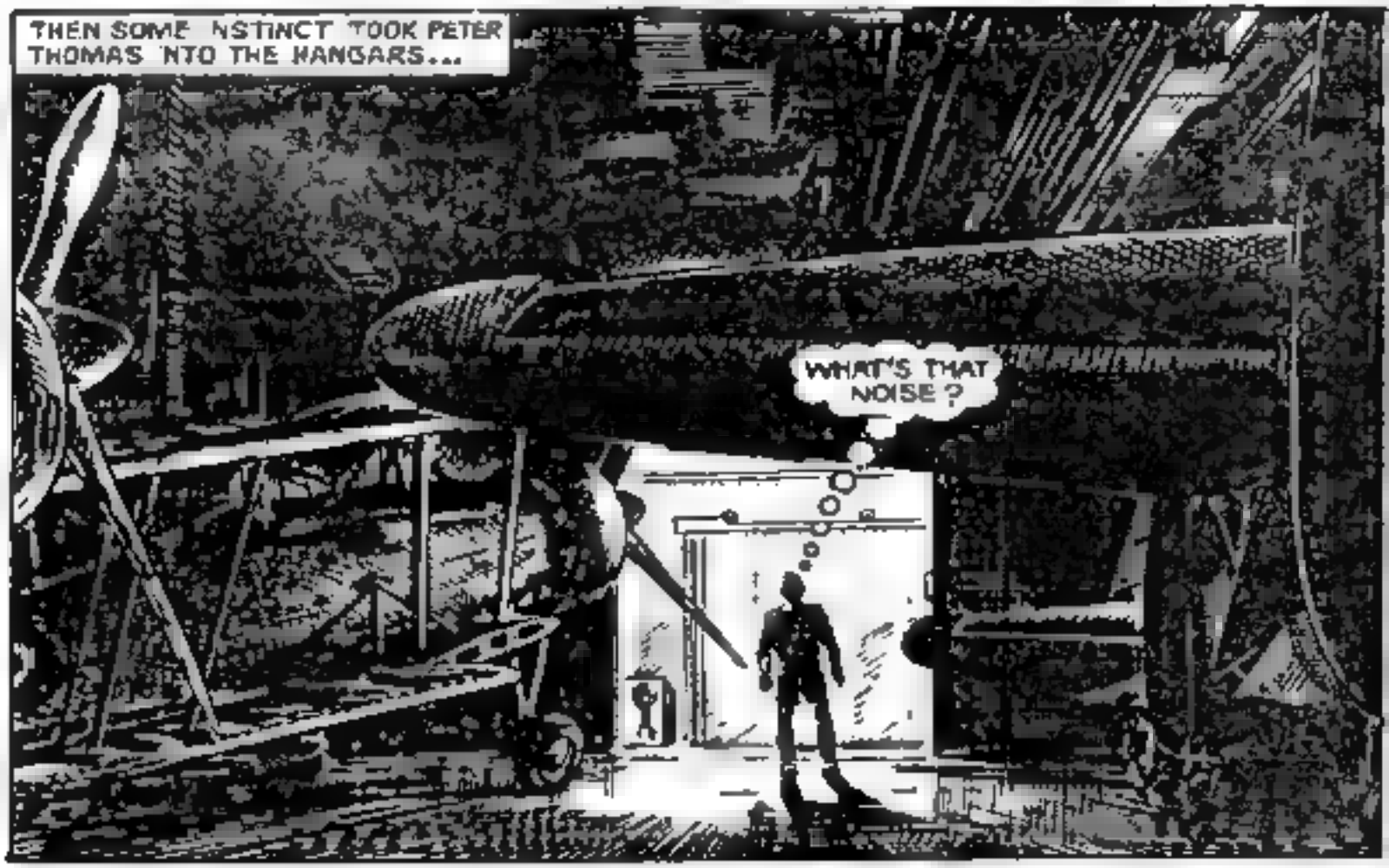
FEAR SWEPT ACROSS PATTERSON'S FACE AS PETER THRUST THE EVIDENCE UNDER HIS NOSE.
THESE CAME FROM A HURRICANE! THERE WERE ONLY TWO OF US UP TODAY SO IT MUST HAVE BEEN YOURS! AND WHILE WE'RE ABOUT IT, THERE'S THE RUDDER BAR . . .
BUT, SKIPPER— I—I . . .

THE FRIGHTENED PILOT REALISED THEN THAT HE WAS TRAPPED.
ALL RIGHT, SKIPPER! THEY'RE MY ROUNDS — BUT IT WAS AN ACCIDENT — YOU'VE GOT TO BELIEVE ME! YOU AND THAT EYTIE WERE DEAD IN LINE WHEN I GAVE HIM A BURST. I KNEW I HAD HIT YOU AS WELL ...
... THEN I REALISED THAT YOU WERE OKAY. I TOLD YOU THE ITALIAN HAD HIT YOU. I WAS SCARED THEN. I KNEW YOU'D GROUND ME IF I TOLD THE TRUTH. BUT THE OTHER STUFF, ABOUT THE RUDDER BAR — I KNOW NOTHING ABOUT THAT, SKIPPER SO HELP ME!

THERE WAS NO MISTAKING THE SINCERITY IN THE MAN'S VOICE.
ALL RIGHT THEN, PATTERSON. BUT IF YOU DIDN'T, WHO THE DEVIL DID?
IT MUST BE ONE OF THE FITTERS, SURELY, SKIPPER? WHO ELSE WOULD TOUCH YOUR PLANE BUT YOU?

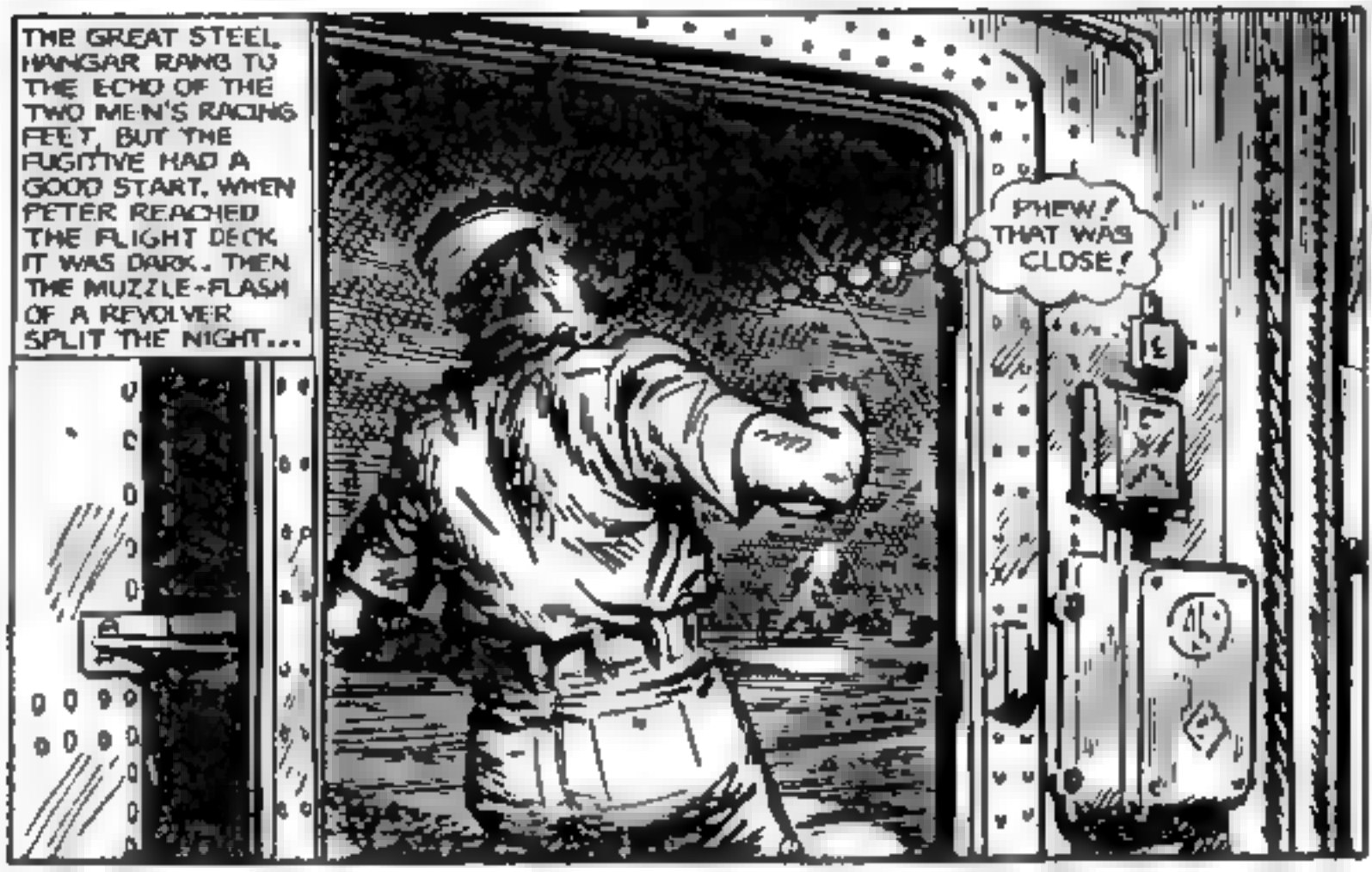
THOSE FEW WORDS OF PATTERSON'S WERE ENOUGH. THE REAL TRUTH HIT PETER LIKE A BOLT FROM THE BLUE.
WHO ELSE...
HEY, SKIPPER! WAIT — WHAT THE BLAZES?

FARTHER ALONG THE COMPANIONWAY, PETER FLUNG OPEN A DOOR — BUT THE CABIN WAS EMPTY.
NOT HERE! WHERE COULD HE BE, THIS TIME OF NIGHT?

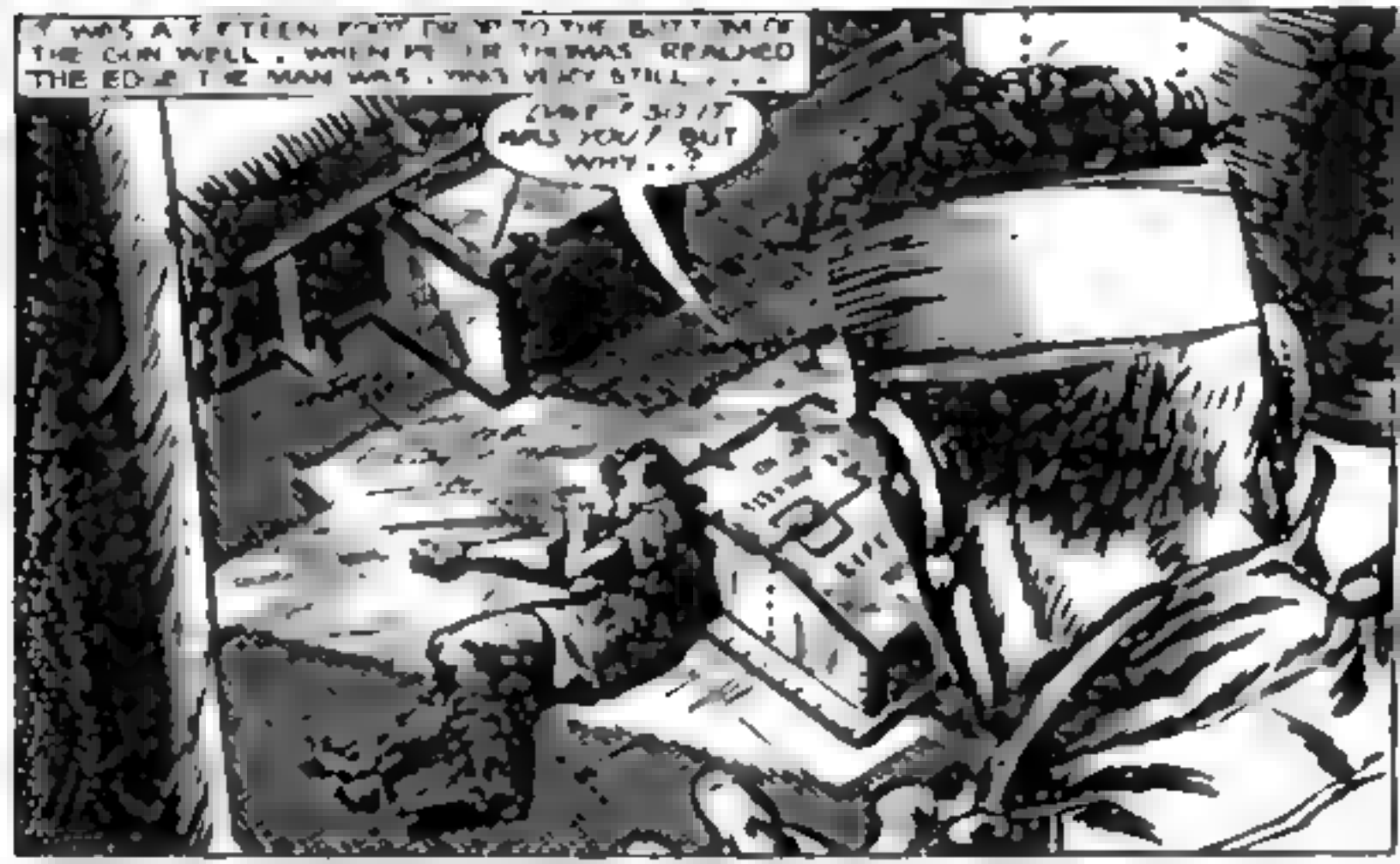

THEN SOME INSTINCT TOOK PETER THOMAS INTO THE HANGARS...
WHAT'S THAT NOISE?

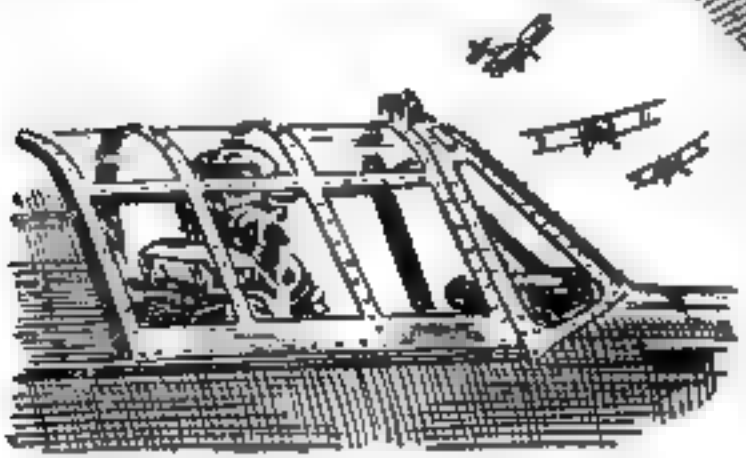
THE SOUND BECAME CLEARER AS HE NEARED ITS SOURCE. IT WAS THE HARSH SCRAPING OF METAL AGAINST METAL. THEN...
HEY! WHAT THE BLAZES ARE YOU DOING THERE?

THE DARK FIGURE MOVED THEN WITH LIGHTNING SPEED ~ TOWARDS THE DOOR LEADING OUT OF THE HANGAR
STOP! YOU CAN'T GET AWAY!


THE GREAT STEEL HANGAR RANG TO THE ECHO OF THE TWO MEN'S RACING FEET, BUT THE FUGITIVE HAD A GOOD START. WHEN PETER REACHED THE FLIGHT DECK IT WAS DARK. THEN THE MUZZLE-FLASH OF A REVOLVER SPLIT THE NIGHT...
PHEW! THAT WAS CLOSE!

AND RAN A FEW -
BUT NOW WITH THE
BLINDNESS OF PANIC
HE DID NOT SEE THE
TAUT WIRE STRETCHED
ACROSS THE PASSAGE
AARRGH!


IT WAS A FIFTEEN FOOT DROP TO THE BOTTOM OF
THE OLD WELL . WHEN HE HIT THE MAS REACHED
THE EDGE THE MAN WAS . WAS VERY STILL . . .
OH! I DID IT
WAS YOU! BUT
WHY . . ?

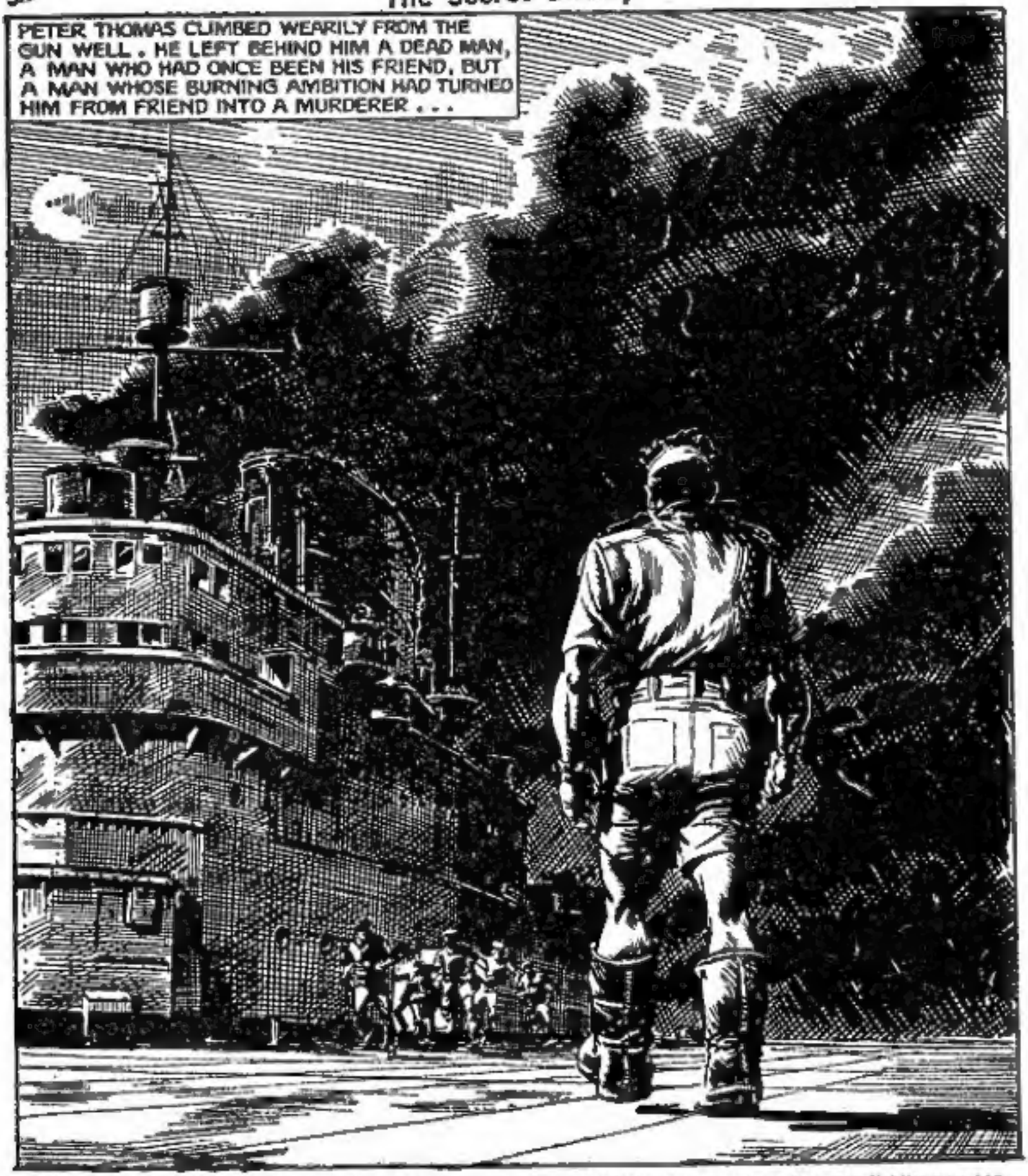


"...WHAT CLINCHED IT WAS WHAT YOU SAID WHEN WE RE-FORMED AFTER HITTING THAT CONVOY. IF YOU HADN'T CUT THROUGH MY RUDDER BAR YOURSELF YOU COULDN'T HAVE KNOWN I WAS IN TROUBLE..."

DAVE HARVEY LAUGHED THEN. BUT IT WAS THE LAUGH OF A DYING MAN...
PRETTY SMART, SKIPPER. BUT I BET THAT FRANG... OF MINE HAD YOU FOOLED...EH?
IT DID FOR A WHILE, DAVE. THEN I GUESSED THAT MUST JUST HAVE BEEN AN ACCIDENT. BUT WHY DID YOU DO IT, DAVE?

THE WORDS HISSED THROUGH THE DYING MAN'S LIPS...
I WANTED—COMMAND. WHEN THEY GAVE IT—TO YOU AFTER—I'D GOT RID OF BOOTH, IT WAS TOO LATE TO GO BACK. I ALWAYS MADE A POOR SECOND-BEST...
YOU DARNED FOOL, DAVE! YOU DARNED FOOL!
A DEEP SIGH CAME FROM DAVE HARVEY AND HIS HEAD SLUMPED FORWARD.

The Secret Enemy



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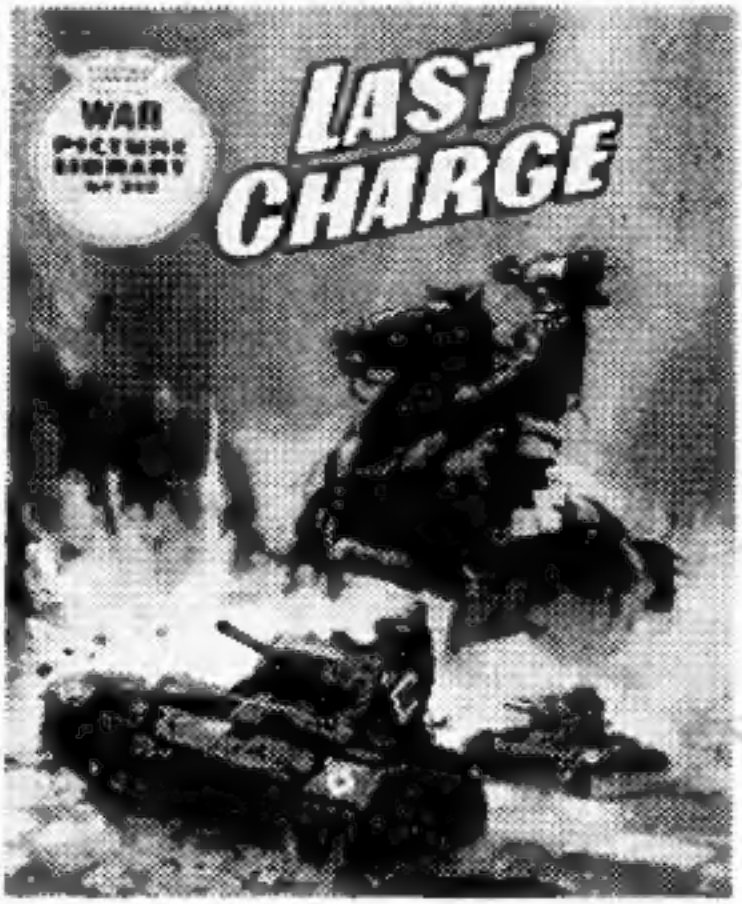

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